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ABSTRACT

Climate and culture are inherent in the life of every organization, including schools. They are difficult to define and even more difficult to change, yet any reform effort must address them first if it is to succeed. This report helps school leaders understand these crucial factors and measure their influences on the school. It offers various strategies for implementing school-improvement efforts that work. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the terms "climate" and "culture," and chapter 2 offers definitions of the terms. Leadership roles played by the principal, superintendent, and school board are examined in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 describes and offers examples of holistic restructuring strategies, such as shared decision making, stages in the strategic planning process, the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) model, and the Coalition for Essential Schools model. Chapter 5 discusses ways to shape climate through instructional techniques. Various methods for measuring school climate are explored in chapter 6. Chapters 7 through 9 offer strategies for engaging parents and community members, dealing with the personal concerns of those involved with program implementation, and mobilizing channels of communication. A brief bibliography and list of contact resources are included. (LMI)

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

IMPROVING

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By Peggy O

and Donald Lynes

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IMPROVING SCHOOL

Climate & CULTURE

By Peggy Odell Gonder

Edited by
Donald L. Hymes

The AASA Critical Issues Series

Climate and culture are inherent in the life of every organization, including schools. They are difficult to define and even more difficult to change, yet any reform effort must address them first if it is to have any hope of success.

Exactly what are climate and culture? What is their impact on student learning? How can they be measured? Most important, what must school leaders do to reshape them as they face the challenge of the decade: school improvement?

This Critical Issues Report helps school leaders understand these crucial yet intangible factors and measure their influence on the school. It offers many strategies for implementing school improvement efforts that work.

This report was written by Peggy Odell Gonder, a free-lance education writer and public relations consultant living in Pleasanton, Texas. It was edited by Donald L. Hymes, editor/manager of the AASA Critical Issues Series. AASA Publications Manager Leslie Eckard provided editing assistance. Special thanks go to the many educators and experts who responded to the AASA survey for this book, and to the experts whose contributions were cited.

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Critical Issues Report No. 27

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CHAPTER ONE

Climate & CULTURE

AN OVERVIEW

Climate and culture are two related but distinct concepts that affect how well schools function. Climate reflects how students and staff feel about being at school each day. Organizational culture is a newer concept in education that is difficult to define and even harder to assess, because it reflects deeply embedded beliefs and practices so ingrained they are taken for granted. Understanding both concepts and how they affect attitudes and behavior is crucial to school improvement. Disregarding them means risking that employees will merely pay lip service to reforms and continue "business as usual."

The seventh-grade classroom hums with purposeful activity. Mrs. Baxter, the science teacher, explains the steps the students will take to dissect frogs the following day. The students listen attentively and take notes as she circulates around the room, answering questions.

Across town, the scene is very different. Mr. Rutledge is delivering a lecture, not on science, but on rules of behavior. A promised activity is denied to the class because of the misbehavior of a few. Becky, a high-achieving student, fumes inwardly at the injustice. Andy, two rows over, plans his visit to a friend's house after school. He has heard nothing that would focus his thoughts on life science.

These two junior high science classrooms are a study in contrasts. In Mrs. Baxter's class, the focus is on learning. Lessons are planned that keep students actively involved and engaged in instruction. In Mr. Rutledge's class, the priority appears to be control. Learning is a focus *part* of the time, but an oppressive atmosphere gets in the way of students' motivation to learn.

The first class exudes a positive climate and an achievement-oriented culture. In the second, a negative climate permeates the class. The culture — or norms and beliefs of Mr. Rutledge's students — is that science is one class they must "get through" rather than enjoy.

A MULTIFACETED ISSUE

As these hypothetical classrooms suggest, critical ingredients that go beyond textbooks and instructional strategies affect school quality and effectiveness. These elements of climate and culture play a major role in the attitudes of students, faculty, and community in shaping whether a school is considered "good" or one to avoid.

While climate and culture are intangible, it is possible to make observations and assessments about them. Although they are not the only important aspects to

consider when improving schools, many experts feel that positive climate and the appropriate culture must be present before change can succeed and have a long-term impact on the school and its students.

More important than ever. Schools have been on the firing line for years. Negative national reports have been followed by ballot proposals for voucher systems that encourage parents to go shopping for the "best" school for their children. In addition, the faltering economy has impeded efforts to provide adequate funding for the public schools.

In this atmosphere, attention to climate is even more important to ensure that morale stays high and the staff can be most effective.

Climate and achievement

The bottom line of school performance is student achievement, and research in the 1970s and 1980s found a distinct link between positive school climate and high staff productivity and student achievement.

In a national survey of school administrators conducted for this report, three-fourths of the respondents said climate played a "very important" role in student achievement, and 97 percent agreed that climate was either "very important" or "important" in student achievement.

As knowledge of school organizations and human behavior has expanded, researchers such as R. Taguiri and Lawrence Lezotte have broadened their definition of school climate beyond achievement. They describe one aspect of climate as the "norms, beliefs, and feelings of a school." These same factors, however, also are integral to definitions of culture, which is different from climate.

Organizational parallels

Parallel to school climate studies, other theorists were looking at the cultures of a variety of organizations, including schools. Books such as *Corporate Cultures* by Allen Kennedy and Terrence Deal, and *In Search of Excellence* by Tom Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., illustrated how organizations carry unique personalities — or cultures — that shape the way they function and determine how employees feel about working there.

The high performing companies profiled in *In Search of Excellence* shared common cultural norms or standards of behavior as well as common beliefs. For example, high performing companies are committed to the norm of staying "close to the customer"—tailoring products and services to meet their needs. Management at these companies share the belief that the employees are its most important resource.

Such cultural norms and shared beliefs also are present in high performing schools. The Secondary Schools Recognition Program of the U. S. Department of Education, for example, recognizes outstanding schools on the basis of 14 characteristics and five student outcomes. While measurable indicators such as low dropout rates and high rates of achievement on standardized tests are assessed, the judges also look for evidence of a positive culture.

> ***The bottom line of school performance is student achievement, and research in the 1970s and 1980s found a distinct link between positive school climate and high staff productivity and student achievement.***

These characteristics include standards that call for homework to be frequent and monitored, and the belief that expectations for achievement should be high for all students.

Elements of culture can be elusive. An outsider might detect them only after spending considerable time in an organization, talking with employees, and observing how departments function and how decisions are made. An organization's culture reflects deeply held beliefs and attitudes. The author M. Bower, in the *Will to Manage* calls this "the way we do things around here."

Blurred distinctions

Some educators and researchers now share the view held by culture expert Terrence Deal of Vanderbilt University that the **climate** of a school refers to the short-term, malleable aspects of the school's physical and psychological environment, and **culture** refers to the long-term, deeply embedded beliefs of an organization — the "feel" of a school, its myths and its moral code.

Since some educators see climate as including beliefs and attitudes, and such beliefs are primary to culture, the distinction has become blurred. When viewed from this perspective, many studies that have focused on climate have really examined both climate and culture. This interrelationship underscores the importance of both to school improvement.

Effective Schools. Effective schools researchers have identified a number of climate- and culture-related characteristics found in effective schools and absent in ineffective schools. Characteristics common to effective schools vary somewhat by organization and study, but some of the most frequently mentioned are:

- **High expectations for students** — The staff adopts the optimistic attitude that all students will succeed and proceeds accordingly.
- **Student-centeredness** — Educators modify the curriculum to meet individual needs so all students can succeed. The school is structured to increase the amount of student-teacher interaction.
- **Safe and disciplined schools** — Students feel secure and distractions are eliminated so the focus can be on learning.
- **Orderly atmosphere** — The school enforces a network of rules that communicate fairness and predictability to all.
- **Focused mission** — Staff members have a sense of purpose that undergirds daily activities.
- **Coherent plan** — Teachers and administrators develop a plan to raise student achievement that addresses student outcomes.
- **Teacher efficacy** — Teachers have the proper training and tools, giving them confidence in the knowledge that they can overcome obstacles to help students learn.
- **Frequent monitoring of progress** — A system operates that quickly identifies students who need extra help and ensures that all students are challenged.
- **Rewards and incentives for teachers and students** — These focus attention on the positive, establishing momentum for success.
- **Positive physical environment** — Whether the building is old or new, a well-maintained school displaying student work sends the message that students and staff are important.
- **Low sense of futility** — Students feel they can succeed and that learning and good grades are the result of effort and determination, not luck.
- **Community support** — A community culture that expects high achievement provides a reservoir of long-term support that spans times of stability and changes, such as in school leadership and demographics.

These characteristics illustrate the close relationship climate and culture play in a school's ability to help its students be successful.

Community support critical

Community support is both a cause and an effect with successful schools. More than 90 percent of superintendents responding to a survey for this Critical Issues Report indicated that community support plays a "very important" or "important" role in a positive school climate. When asked, "What will kill a school climate?" respondents mentioned a "lack of community support" and "controversy among stakeholders" as key factors.

Strengthening Student-Teacher Ties

Littleton High School south of Denver, Colorado, has taken an unusual approach to being student-centered. Through Direction 2000 an education reform package designed by teachers, administrators, and parents — Littleton developed a teacher-mentor program.

Each certified staff member is paired with four students a year, up to a maximum of 16, in an Educational Advisement Program. Teachers meet weekly with their charges throughout their four years of high school, reserving one hour a week to meet in-depth with one of the students.

"Our goal is to have one adult who knows each student intimately well," said Doug Linkhart, a science teacher who helped develop the program. Once each semester the teacher, student, and parent meet to discuss the student's educational goals and develop a plan to meet those goals.

Direction 2000 grew out of "a frustration that students were showing less motivation and greater acceptance of failure," said Linkhart. "We decided it was because students didn't have an active role in their learning." One purpose of the advisement program is "to put students in charge of their education, so they will feel greater responsibility and ownership for their learning."

To make time for the advisement sessions, teachers "gave up" hall duty. Instead, high school seniors and community volunteers were recruited to monitor the halls.

Staff and parents alike are enthusiastic about Direction 2000 for two reasons: They played an active role in developing the school reform, and the school faithfully kept parents informed of the recommendations and changes throughout the long evolution of the reform effort.

A five-year study of 12 London schools completed by British researchers in 1979 found that student achievement, attendance, and behavior were better in schools where teachers expected all students to achieve. Described in the book *Fifteen Thousand Hours,* these schools were effective because they had developed a climate that supported learning and a culture that expected achievement.

One way effective schools ensure that all students are learning is by implementing frequent monitoring of student progress. Schools do not try to "explain away" low achievement through stereotyping. Instead, they use low scores as flags to determine what areas of curriculum and instruction need improvement. In the case of individual pupils, such monitoring becomes a vehicle for feedback to the students and attention to their needs.

Lost in the crowd

Sometimes, climate and culture can be improved with restructuring class sizes and school days. For example, many students "fall through the cracks" because they are invisible in large secondary schools. They don't get into trouble, but neither do they reach their potential.

The Coalition of Essential Schools recommends organizing secondary schools so that no teacher has more than 80 students. Under such a structure, teachers can get to know their students as individuals and can tune in and offer extra support when necessary, such as when a family is going through a serious illness or a divorce. Such an arrangement contributes to a positive climate because students feel their teachers care about them, which motivates the students to study and learn.

"In my second year of teaching I had 204 students," Theodore Sizer, founder of the Coalition, said in an interview. "I didn't know them as kids. I simply knew them as history or English students . . . and I served them very poorly." The solution for many secondary schools is to form interdisciplinary teams, where teachers teach two subjects and have the same students for more than one period a day.

Organizational traits

It is obvious that schools are more than a collection of individual traits. Like people, organizations have their own personalities that affect the persons who work and study there. Those organizations have a positive, supportive climate and culture largely due to the leadership of the principal and community support.

In a study of exemplary secondary schools recognized by the United States Department of Education, Professors John E. Roueche and George Baker, III, found five organizational characteristics that enabled these schools to excel. They described these characteristics in a book for AASA, *Profiling Excellence in American Schools:*

1. **Leadership by example.** Staff members in effective schools look upon the principal as one who leads by example. The focus is on student achievement, not merely smooth management of operations. Effective principals clearly communicate goals for the school and behavioral expectations of the staff. They are "well-organized, task-oriented and well-informed about what is happening in the school," Roueche and Baker wrote. "In fact, these principals spend most of their days outside of their offices."
2. **Instructional leadership.** Principals in effective schools perceive themselves as instructional leaders. They are actively involved in observing classrooms, ensuring that time is used effectively for instruction. This leadership does not displace the teacher's role in instruction. The authors noted that many studies show "this commitment to leadership is typically coupled to a commitment to participative decision making." The responsibility for planning, implementation, and evaluation is shared among members of the professional staff.
3. **Growth-oriented climate.** The organization is committed to professional growth of its staff — particularly its teachers — through staff development. The teachers see inservice education as worthwhile and related to instruction because they are actively involved in planning and implementing the training. This involvement leads to exchange of ideas and selection of topics that will carry over to the classroom.
4. **Accountability through evaluation.** Because teachers in effective schools feel responsible for student success, they "welcome systematic efforts to evaluate their teaching effectiveness, both by their peers and by the administration," the authors noted.
5. **Community involvement.** The climate of the school recognizes the important role parents play in their children's education and encourages involvement by the community. As a result, effective schools typically have more active parent organizations, more parents visiting classrooms, and principals who report better relations with parents.

Successful schools also encourage students and staff

Student Retention and Climate

While a supportive school climate can have a positive effect on achievement, policies and practices that are perceived as punishing students can have a negative effect on school climate and success in school.

Reform efforts have sought to do away with social — or automatic — promotion to eliminate the problem of functionally illiterate high school graduates. While it is important to ensure that students have necessary skills before leaving school, the press to retain students has its down side as well.

Grading and retention practices can have a negative effect on climate and on an individual child's attitude and success in school. According to Texas Education Commissioner Lionel "Skip" Meno, 95 percent of children who are failed once drop out of school, and 99 percent of students flunked twice drop out.

"Retention is good for sorting out the winners from the losers, but it's not good for education," Meno said. "This clearly does not work." Meno recommends using Chapter 1 funds for summer school classes to help students catch up instead of holding them back to repeat a grade.

For both students and staff, success breeds a feeling of accomplishment, which results in a positive school climate. Conversely, it can be argued that a positive school climate is a precondition for success.

No amount of artistry on the part of teachers can bring about learning if the student does not make the effort to listen and remember the information presented. The student ultimately controls whether the information is heard, digested, and retained.

to get involved in community-based projects. "Successful schools do know their community, cultivate a rapport with their community, and work hard to gain their reputations," they concluded.

Leadership essential

Leadership, then, is essential in forging positive climates and achievement-oriented cultures. Principals and superintendents should have a vision for the school and district that is communicated both verbally and through actions.

School leaders play important symbolic roles that convey values through the way they perform routine activities and the attention paid to various rituals that are part of school life. Later chapters will describe how the principal can "read" the culture of the school and the types of actions that can reinforce positive cultures and redirect negative ones.

While strong leadership and vision are important to climate, good leadership also facilitates change. One important component in this process is giving the staff an active role in improving the school. Such active and meaningful involvement accomplishes three things:

- Teachers are directly involved with students so they are in a prime position to determine what is needed.
- Staff "buy-in" for support is essential to implement changes.
- Involvement will enhance morale because staff members will feel they have some control over their working lives.

It is equally important to involve parents and the community because they have a strong stake in the school as it affects their children and the reputation of the community.

Of course, the support of students in the learning process is essential. No amount of artistry on the part of teachers can bring about learning if the student does not make the effort to listen and remember the information presented. The student ultimately controls whether the information is heard, digested, and retained. Learning, however, is most likely to occur in environments where the students, faculty, and staff all want to be there and support the goals of the school.

Site-based management

For many superintendents responding to the AASA survey, site-based management has helped make schools more effective and improved climate and culture. For principals, on the other hand, it can mean quite an adjustment in style of leadership. They have

found they must share power by seeking input from various stakeholders in the school community.

In Kimball, Minnesota, school effectiveness committees of teachers and principals set goals based on the district mission statement. In developing effectiveness plans, schools sponsor forums for parent input on such topics as grading and discipline. Advice from support staff, including custodians and food service personnel, have been sought on other issues.

"It has given principals a different perspective on how a building will look in the future," Kenneth Holling, superintendent of the 1,000-student Kimball Public Schools, said in an interview. "It's so much easier to have a top-down operation. I don't think the administrative process as we know it is going to function any longer. It isn't going to be effective any more. The old iron rule is gone. People feel they should have more involvement in what's being taught, when and by whom. And I think that's good."

A background tapestry

It is evident from the various definitions and examples cited above that climate and culture are different, but interrelated. They exist whether the staff recognizes them or not, and they are integrally tied to characteristics of a school that often are mistakenly regarded as independent.

It is important to attend to climate so staff and students will be motivated to improve. Unless the culture changes, however, long-term reform will falter because the shared values necessary to sustain reform will not be held by those concerned.

Issues of climate and culture need not consume inordinate amounts of an administrator's time on an ongoing basis. Instead, they are aspects of the school that require significant amounts of attention at some points in the life of the school — such as when the principal is new or major changes are being implemented. At other times, they can be positive forces present in the background, but not all-consuming.

It is evident from the various definitions and examples cited that climate and culture are different but interrelated. They exist whether the staff recognizes them or not, and they are integrally tied to characteristics of a school that often are mistakenly regarded as independent.

In any case, it is important not to ignore climate and culture, and to understand how they affect the life of the school in subtle and subconscious ways because the dynamics of these two phenomena can have a major impact on other goals the schools seek to achieve.

CHAPTER 2

Climate & CULTURE

WHAT ARE THEY?

Climate is a term that refers to current feelings and attitudes. It reflects how students, staff, and parents feel about the school — whether it is a positive place to work and learn or one that is full of problems. Culture refers to a deeper, longer-term phenomenon that underlies the values held by the people who work and study there and the assumptions they apply to both routine and challenging situations. An organization's culture develops over time. It is difficult to perceive and describe, but it exerts a powerful influence over the way an organization operates.

Climate and culture are concepts that each relate to the "feel" of a school, but they influence the life of the organization in different ways. Both are important to the school's quality of life and its ability to produce positive student outcomes, including high achievement, and such nonacademic goals as producing well-rounded, responsible members of society.

One major difference between climate and culture is their timetable. Climate reflects what is happening today; culture embodies the values, beliefs and norms a school staff and community have developed over a long period of time.

Some researchers have suggested that climate as an approach to school reform is rooted in the discipline of sociology, while culture is based on an anthropological approach.

DEFINING CLIMATE

Climate is a term that refers to the atmosphere in a school. It consists of the attitudes shared by members of subgroups, such as students, faculty, and staff, and by the school population as a whole. Climate is generally considered to be positive or negative, although some aspects of a school climate can be positive while others are negative.

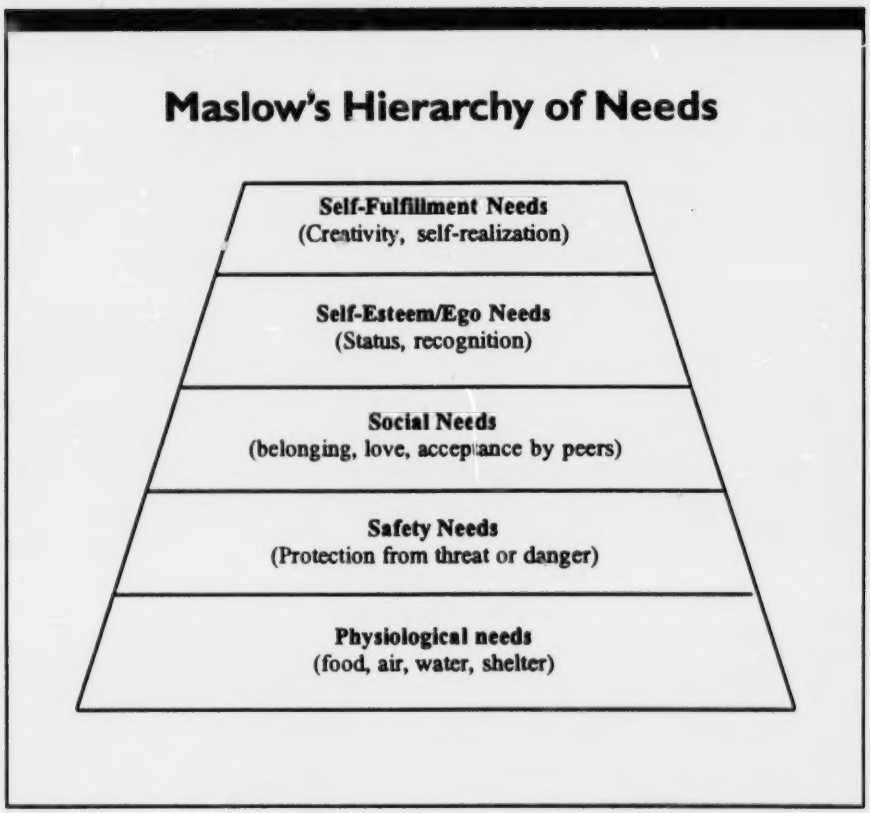
Climate characteristics affect the morale, productivity, and satisfaction of persons involved in an organization. A positive climate results when members feel they are valued as individuals and that they are contributing to the success of the organization.

Fulfilling basic needs

Motivational expert Abraham Maslow identified a hierarchy of needs that must be satisfied before individuals can reach their goals. The needs are in a priority sequence. The theory is that once the most basic needs are satisfied, individuals are driven by the next higher need.

In schools, a positive climate serves the top three human needs on a regular basis, while safe, clean, and orderly schools would fulfill the first two needs.

An organization develops a particular culture over time. It represents the shared understandings of the members of the group of how things ought to be.



Complex factors

In the past, climate has been associated strictly with the affective dimension of school life: how students and staff *feel* about being in school. Effective schools research has shown that climate is far more complex, with a broad range of factors influencing it, ranging from the level of academic expectations staff has for students to how often the halls are cleaned.

Some educators now describe climate as having four dimensions: academic, social, physical, and affective. Many of the characteristics associated with effective schools fall into one of these dimensions.

Brenda Hurbanis of the Anne Arundel County, Maryland, Public Schools and Peggy Walters of the Maryland State Department of Education developed a statewide climate plan. They describe the components of the four dimensions as follows:

- **Academic** — includes the instructional norms, beliefs and practices of a school, including an academic emphasis, high expectations, monitoring of student progress, a safe and orderly environment, and the presence of rewards and praise.
- **Social** — shaped by the types of communication between persons in the school, including interaction between students and teachers, communication among students, and the opportunity for student suggestions in the workings of the school. Site-based management, with its emphasis on working with key stakeholders in a school, addresses this aspect of school climate.
- **Physical** — refers to the physical and material aspects of the school. Researchers have determined that the age of the building is not as important as the amount of maintenance — whether those who work and study there feel the building receives proper care. Climate also is affected positively and negatively by the degree to which staff feel they have access to materials.
- **Affective** — refers to the feelings and attitudes shared by the students of the school. While the first

three dimensions influence climate, the final dimension reflects the results of these factors and others on how students regard their school. The indicators of a positive school climate include respect, trust, high morale, cohesiveness, caring, academic and social growth, communication, and opportunities for participation.

DEFINING CULTURE

Culture is a term used by anthropologists to describe entire societies that differ from others in their modes of dress, diet, customs, and beliefs. The term "organizational culture" was developed in recent years to describe corporations and other groups that differ from similar organizations in the way they make decisions and conduct day-to-day operations. For convenience, this book will use the shorter term, "culture," to refer to the phenomenon of organizational culture, particularly as it relates to schools and school districts.

An organization develops a particular culture over time. It represents the group members' shared understandings of how things ought to be. These common understandings or assumptions evolve based on shared experiences.

The powerful influence culture exerts on the members of an organization has been aptly described by Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers:

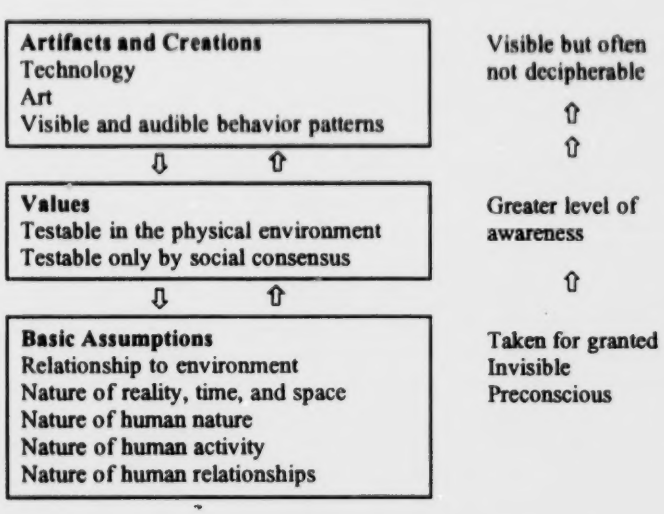
> Ten thousand new teachers each year enter the New York City school system as a result of retirement, death, job turnover and attrition. These new teachers come from all over the country. They represent all religions, races, political persuasions, and educational institutions. But the amazing thing is that after three weeks in the classroom, you can't tell them apart from the teachers they replaced.

What then, is culture? The most comprehensive definition of culture has been advanced by Edgar H. Schein, professor of management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, based on his research and extensive experience observing and advising organizations in the United States and throughout the world. In his book, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Schein proposes that culture should not be equated with surface features of an organization, such as its philosophy or rules of thumb, but instead:

> that the term culture should be reserved for the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously and that define in a basic "taken-for-granted" fashion an organization's views of itself and its environment.
>
> These assumptions and beliefs are learned responses to a group's problems of survival in its external environment and its problems of internal integration. They come to be taken for granted because they solve those problems repeatedly and reliably.

Organizational Culture and Leadership

Levels of Culture and Their Interaction



Adapted from: Schein, Edgar H. Organizational Psychology. *1980.*

This deeper level of assumptions is to be distinguished from the "artifacts" (tangible items) and "values" that are manifestations of surface levels of the culture, but not the essence of the culture.

Levels of culture

The definition becomes more understandable when key elements are considered separately. One reason culture is so difficult to identify is that is buried in multiple layers:

- **Artifacts and symbols** — the physical and social environment in an organization.
- **Values** — the group's shared understanding, originally proposed by one individual, of the way things "ought" to be.
- **Basic Assumptions** — deeply held beliefs about human nature, relationships, and the nature of reality, time and space.

Artifacts. In a school setting, artifacts may include the school building, how it is decorated and maintained, and the presence of technology. A school where student papers and art work are prominently displayed symbolizes the belief that student work is inherently valuable and should be celebrated.

Values. Values can be illuminated when a school staff confronts a problem, such as a low school test score in mathematics on a state assessment. The way a staff or principal reacts to the problem reflects such values as whether the solution should be imposed from the top-down: suggesting a value that might be stated: "the principal knows best," or if the decision will be determined jointly ("everyone has ideas that are worthy of consideration").

Past experience reinforces previously held values. For example, if a low assessment in math had previously been improved with more homework, the value of adding outside drill and practice will guide the solution to the current problem.

When first proposed, a value represents a single individual's opinion that is open to challenge or interpretation. "If the solution works and the group has a shared perception of that success, the value gradually starts a process of transformation into a belief and, ultimately, an assumption," Schein explained.

Not all values are so transformed. Some solutions do not work consistently and others can never be independently verified. Some values are articulated in written documents as a moral stance to guide members of the group in certain situations. School and district mission

When Cotton came to the 3,500-pupil school in a Denver, Colorado, suburb, the superintendent and some parents were concerned that Cherry Creek was not reaching its full potential. Perceived problems included discipline, absenteeism, drug use by students, and overly unstructured curricula and graduation requirements.

The climate at Cherry Creek High School suffered when new principal Hank Cotton started changing the laissez faire cultural norms regarding attendance and curriculum diversity.

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The new superintendent gave Cotton a mandate for change, but not everyone shared the view that changes were needed. Some parents, students, and faculty were content with the way things were.

Cotton instituted a stricter attendance policy, and more than 200 suspension notices were issued. Parents complained and Cotton spent much time on the telephone, explaining his philosophy that students could not learn if they were not in class. Since parents also valued education, they soon came around. Absenteeism dropped dramatically the second semester.

When Cotton asked the social studies department to redesign its curriculum, eliminating many of the 70 mini-courses, teachers filed one of the first union grievances in the school's history, saying curriculum was the prerogative of the faculty. The school board ultimately upheld the

Change & Confrontation

principal's right to ask for revisions to the curriculum.

Cotton also generated ire by appointing department heads. They had previously been elected by teachers in the department. A petition signed by more than half the teachers in the school voiced concerns about the change.

Building support

While the effort to establish more positive cultural values was lonely at first, Cotton took a number of steps to build support for the changes. He reduced trivial and annoying tasks previously assigned to teachers — such as monitoring halls and writing passes — and transferred these duties to others. His purpose was to reinforce the value that teaching was the most important activity in the school.

He also actively encouraged behaviors that reinforced the new cultural norms. Cotton publicly recognized teachers and administrators who demonstrated the values of excellence, improvement, and collegiality. These actions included:

- Verbal recognition.
- Administrative support (funds to attend conferences, materials for special projects)
- Appointment to summer committees developing curriculum materials.

The principal also met regularly with the Student Senate, Parent Senate, and Faculty Senate to discuss programs and problems. The meetings "resolved the conflicts at hand and allowed Cotton to explain his purposes," explained Deal and Kent Peterson in describing Cotton's experience in the book, *The Principal's Role in Shaping School Culture.* "The meetings developed energy, commitment, and consensus that previously had not been tapped in school."

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Victory at hand

Support for the principal increased as the first two classes of students graduated and new students enrolled who were not familiar with the "old" school. Cotton gave new responsibilities to student government and worked closely with all major groups in the school, listening to their feelings and informing them in advance of any new programs or policies.

Disgruntled teachers transferred to a new high school that opened in the district and Cotton was able to hire new teachers who more closely matched his values for the school.

Support grew first from students and parents, then from teachers.

Adjusting priorities

Student academic performance is intrinsically rewarding to teachers. Since Cotton was stressing improved academic achievement, the changes he implemented did not impose new values on the school, but reinforced existing values teachers and the community placed on student achievement. The change was that Cotton raised the priority of achievement compared to the school's prior emphasis upon equality and noncompetitiveness.

Within a few years, the expectations for excellence in teaching were so strong that new teachers often felt pressure their first year to measure up to the Cherry Creek standard.

Within a decade, attendance at school and in class became one of the highest in the district, even though the open campus remained. The change came about "largely because it was part of the school's mores," the authors wrote, "not because of fear of sanctions."

statements serve to articulate such normative standards or values as "respect for all students, regardless of ethnic background," and the expectation that "all students have the capacity to learn."

Assumptions. Assumptions operate on a deeper, subconscious level and reflect beliefs that are taken for granted about human nature. For example, solutions to a math crisis would be influenced differently according to which, if any, of the following cultural assumptions the principal and staff shared about parents:

1. Parents are partners who can help with the problem.
2. Parents are interlopers who are ready to condemn the school.
3. Parents are apathetic bystanders who cannot be expected to be part of the solution.

An example in a later chapter shows how surveys of parents and teachers can help to uncover some of these underlying assumptions and correct stereotypes and misinformation where they exist.

TAKE THE SCHOOL'S TEMPERATURE

Climate places a priority on giving individuals an opportunity for input, projecting an image of caring for students and staff, and making students feel important and visitors feel welcome. But observation alone won't reveal if these goals are being met. Measurement is an important means of identifying problems through climate surveys of students, staff, parents, and community.

Climate surveys measure perceptions of students, staff, and parents on characteristics such as:

- Respect
- Trust
- Opportunities for input
- Rewards and praise
- Physical environment
- Morale
- Staff cohesiveness.

Where climate uses concrete tools such as surveys, culture relies more on intuition. Leaders new to an organization must learn to "read" the culture to determine the current mores that guide it. Clues to reading the culture can be found in the stories told about the school, traditions that are important to its members and the way rituals are conducted.

Insights can also be obtained by talking to the school's "tribal elders" — respected members of the faculty — and storytellers to determine what is valued and how members prefer to operate. Symbols, such as a trophy case for academic as well as sports achievements, also signal what values the members of the school culture hold dear.

EXPECT RESISTANCE

During change, climate and culture do not necessarily move in concert. "A negative climate does not equal a failed leadership attempt," Terrence Deal of Vanderbilt University noted in an interview for this report. "When I was a junior high teacher at a school in California, the climate really stunk, but it was the beginning of a cultural shift," Deal explained. "Any time you introduce change, the climate is going to go to hell."

Culture Affects Climate

As the Cherry Creek example shows, cultural shifts can negatively affect climate when stakeholders are satisfied with the status quo. Climate will eventually improve if the cultural change leads to improvements in education, but the going can be rough until the improvements are evident to everyone.

The effect cultural change has on climate depends on a variety of factors, including the conditions leading up to the change, the leadership style of the principal, the types of changes needed, and the way those changes are made.

Encourage risk taking. Studies have shown that the culture of a school must change to support long-term school improvement. Because culture embodies deeply held beliefs about how things operate in an organization, the culture must be shaped to support change or efforts will revert to "business as usual."

For example, schools where the excuse "we've always done it that way" is a dominant cultural norm will have an uphill struggle trying to make significant changes. Instead of immediately implementing new strategies, the principal and key staff may want to develop a culture that supports risk-taking and innovation.

Such a cultural shift would be necessary before teachers would be comfortable trying new instructional strategies. As with any new skill, there is an initial learning curve, and if teachers are not supported in the

The School as Community

The first and second graders at Chauncey Elementary in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, have a group meeting once a week to discuss issues affecting them. A student named C.J. started this discussion, announcing that the children are still pushing others on the slide at recess and lunch. The teacher asked for suggestions on how the problem can be resolved.

"Have the teachers stand 'em against the wall," suggested Melissa. "But the teacher isn't always there," another girl pointed out.

"So we have to do something ourselves," said Patti. "And I think kids have to tell each other not to push."

"But what if they still do?" asked Michelle.

"Then we all ask them not to push and we stop playing until we get it worked out," concluded another student.

A sense of community

Giving students tools to solve problems and a time to discuss them are one way to build a feeling of community in the classroom, said George Wood, who described this meeting at Chauncey in his book, *Schools that Work*. In some exemplary schools, this feeling of community is intentionally nurtured through such devices as weekly meetings and group rule-setting.

At Fratney Elementary in Athens, Georgia, each classroom has a specific time set aside for meetings. The format of the meeting varies with individual teachers, but the intent is the same: to build in students a sense of personal and collective responsibility.

In Becky Trayser's class at Fratney, meetings are formal. A "talking rock" is passed from student to student. One can only speak when holding the rock. Each student has an opportunity to speak, but cannot speak a second time until all the others have had a chance to express an opinion. Students are expected to begin their remarks by paraphrasing the previous speaker, which focuses attention on what classmates have to contribute to the discussion.

Even in kindergarten

In the kindergarten classroom, discussions are less formal and often more personal. Most classroom conflicts center on problems with toys, games, or books. Other times, the class meets just to share what they are working on or to share news in general. In one discussion at the start of the day, a child named Antonio said solemnly, "Some kids are making fun of people on the playground."

"What do you mean by that, Antonio?" responded the teacher.

"I mean they do things like call kids names and stuff. Like fatty or stupid or stuff like that." Antonio's explanation was followed by a lively discussion, guided by the teacher, on how to respond to name-calling. One student suggested standing up for the student and expressing feelings of friendship to the child being taunted.

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The teacher responded: "That's right. I hope you'll all grow up to be strong people and do what's right."

Both classroom teachers are building a sense of community. The classroom meetings "solve issues the students bring up," teacher Becky Trayser said. "We deal with what the problem is, and then brainstorm possible solutions, evaluate those solutions, and choose one to try and see if it works."

Teacher Rita Tenorio observed that her students are taking more responsibility for the group. "It's interesting because they'll tell each other to 'please be quiet' or they'll tell each other 'it's time to sit down now,' which they did not use to do. They are developing a sense of a group."

Climate builders

Giving students a voice in establishing the rules they will live by is one way to build a positive school climate. Students feel connected to the school — that their opinion matters. A good set of rules is no guarantee they will be equitably enforced. Children have an innate sense of fairness and will be highly interested in how the rules are carried out.

Weekly meetings are a way for students to have a continuing involvement in the decisions of the school. As the Chauncey Elementary example illustrates, children

The School as Community, cont.

as young as five years old can be involved in successful decision making.

Good climate goes far beyond rules and meetings. The feeling of community or being part of a school family engenders a positive spirit in students and staff that motivates all to work hard so that projects succeed.

Such feelings of community do not happen quickly or automatically. In fact, the natural inclination is for students to see things strictly from their point of view. Students must be given opportunities to share information and acknowledge each other's feelings for that sense of community to develop.

The shoving problem mentioned earlier was discussed at a weekly event at Chauncey known as the Primary Forum. Each Monday, about 80 first and second graders gather in the multipurpose room to discuss items that primarily are brought up by the children.

"While issues such as pushing on the slide may seem insignificant in our eyes, they often are of vital importance in the eyes of a child," author George Wood explained. "Primary Forum honors those important issues and teaches children how to deal with them as a group."

A cultural dimension

While Wood talks about the classroom meetings in the context of climate, there is a cultural dimension as well. The meetings, as a tradition of the school, send a signal that adults value the opinions of the students. It transmits the expectation that students are capable of solving their own problems.

Although discipline is a major problem in some schools, at Chauncey and Fratney the attention to group problem solving pays off by teaching the students how to take responsibility for their own behavior and problems that arise within the group.

"For these teachers," Wood said, "classroom management is not an 'add-on.' Rather, everything they do works to foster the sort of self-discipline necessary to make communal life possible."

Building such an environment is a major priority for the teachers. Attention to self-discipline reflects the vision these teachers have for their students. "My biggest goal is that they are thinking and caring people," said Charlotte Newman of Chauncey Elementary.

From: Schools That Work *by George Wood, Dutton Press, 1992*

early stages, these new techniques are unlikely to become part of their repertoire.

Think Long-Term. While attention to culture is essential to long-term reform, climate still has an important role in maintaining morale and *esprit de corps*. "I compare climate to a marriage," Minnesota effectiveness consultant Shelley Roy said in an interview. At first, like a marriage, the climate needs significant attention, but over time, activity moves to a goal of maintenance.

"You need to attend to climate and culture every day," Roy explained, "but if they are the dominant focus — to the exclusion of all else — schools won't get anything else done. And the primary goal should be improving student outcomes. Climate and culture are just important means to that end, not an end in themselves."

HOW CULTURE WORKS

The concept of organizational culture was first studied in corporations that were described as having identifiable personalities and belief systems. The most successful corporations are those that have been able to forge "corporate cultures" that support their mission and goals. For the high tech, growth-oriented company, the corporate culture may celebrate experimentation. For the long-time industry leader, a successful culture might focus on pride in workmanship and attention to detail that will produce high quality products and services.

Those who have studied successful organizations — both corporations and schools — have found some common elements that have contributed to the dynamism of a culture and the way that culture is communicated and reinforced to its members. Those elements are:

- Strongly held beliefs and values.
- Stories that communicate what the organization stands for.
- Heroes and heroines (a company president or an outstanding teacher), whose actions and accomplishments embody those values.
- Rituals and ceremonies that set the tone and reinforce values.
- Key individuals — the cultural players — who communicate the values to others, through both word and action.

Values and beliefs

Successful organizations are anchored by strong belief systems that guide management over the life of the

organization, especially during a crisis. A dramatic illustration of this occurred during the poison scare in 1982 surrounding the pain-killer Tylenol.

When poisoned Tylenol capsules turned up, the manufacturer, Johnson & Johnson, reacted quickly by pulling all Tylenol from the shelves and reimbursing customers who returned the product to stores.

The decision was a costly one, but it was guided by the company's long-held belief about health and safety of its customers. Ultimately, J&J returned Tylenol to the market with tamper-proof packaging. Despite the fears of many observers that the incident would spell long-term disaster for the company, both financially and in its public image, Tylenol regained its previous market share quickly, and Johnson & Johnson suffered no lasting damage.

The company did the "right thing" — and remained true to its beliefs. By not sacrificing its values to avoid

Values in Orange County Schools

Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Florida, articulated the district's basic values in the opening pages of its 1992-93 strategic plan, which was developed with involvement from the board, superintendent, staff, teachers, parents, and students. These values illustrate the district's attention to maintaining and improving its culture.

Under the heading, "District Values and Commitments," the plan states:

"Our central values reflected in the mission statement are academic success, self-respect, and an understanding and appreciation of others. In addressing these values we must celebrate differences in individuals, in cultures, and in thinking. We must embrace each student as a member of a group of lifelong learners, provide mentors to pass on learning strategies and knowledge, and give the time and tools necessary to discover and construct concepts. We must ensure joy and success in this process. Throughout our district, in our schools and in every classroom, all programs, processes, and decisions about and for our students must emphasize these values and ideals."

14 commitments

These statements are followed by 14 "commitments" that emphasize making students, teachers, parents, and community members partners in the decision-making process. Orange County's stated commitments reflect important climate considerations that also are characteristic of effective schools:

- Schools must be safe and orderly; disciplinary procedures must be fair and consistent.
- Meeting student needs must be the highest priority.
- Students must be actively engaged in a meaningful learning process where student success is the focus and time is structured to best suit student needs.
- Schools will have clear and focused missions and objectives developed cooperatively, widely communicated, and responsive to the needs of their particular communities and clientele.
- Principals must be educational leaders. Innovation and prudent risk-taking at both the school and district level will be encouraged and rewarded.
- Professional development is essential; it must be cooperatively planned and tailored to meet the needs of individual schools and staffs.
- Mutual respect, trust, fairness, generosity, and tolerance will characterize the environment at schools and district work locations.

The plan continues with student outcomes, goals and objectives. Schools develop action plans to address each objective.

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short-term losses, the company was rewarded by customer loyalty.

Similarly, schools that share deeply held values — such as a commitment to academic excellence — are rewarded by support from parents. Teachers in such schools tend to have high expectations of their students, who want to measure up to the standard set by their predecessors and peers. Schools in low-income areas whose leaders and staff believe all children can learn tend to act on those beliefs, building the instructional program for success and having high expectations of students. Believing all children can learn can lead to high achievement in spite of the odds.

Importance of shared values. In his book, *A Business and Its Beliefs,* IBM founder Thomas Watson wrote:

> The real difference between success and failure in a corporation . . . is how well the organization brings out the great energies and talents of its people. What does it do to help these people find common cause with each other? How can it sustain this common cause and sense of direction through the many changes which take place from one generation to another? Consider any great organization. . . . I think you will find that it owes its resiliency not to its form of organization or administrative skills, but to the power of what we call *beliefs* and the appeal these beliefs have for its people. I firmly believe that any organization, in order to survive and achieve success, must have a sound set of beliefs on which it premises all its policies and actions. . . . If an organization is to meet the challenge of a changing world, it must be prepared to change everything about itself except those beliefs as it moves through corporate life. [All other business factors] are transcended by how strongly the people in the organization believe in its basic precepts and how faithfully they carry them out.

In the best organizations, including schools, those values are articulated often enough that they are well known by all employees.

Communicating through stories

Shared values are most effectively transmitted symbolically through stories, which over time become an organization's myths and legends. Good speech writers, preachers, and effective political leaders such as former President Ronald Reagan know the power of a story to communicate a message. People remember stories better than facts because they involve people and arouse visceral reactions — of pride, awe, humor, or sympathy.

Books written about successful organizations are replete with examples of the power of a story to communicate a message employees will remember. The stories often describe an incident when the company president went to unusual lengths to serve a customer or listen to the employees.

One story in Wal-Mart department store's company lore recounts a time its founder, Sam Walton, bought four dozen doughnuts at an all-night bakery and took them to a distribution center where he sat down and talked with the workers at the shipping dock. At this informal meeting, Walton learned they needed two more showers at that location.

The story, reported in the *Wall Street Journal*, was noteworthy because it occurred at a time when Wal-Mart had 330 stores and 26,000 employees. Walton's actions communicated his deep belief that Wal-Mart employees are important and that they have valuable ideas that to contribute. That's one reason they are called "associates," not "employees." Such values are companywide: top management spends most of its time outside of executive offices, listening to employees.

Leadership consultant Terrence Deal tells of a junior high school faculty that spent a meeting sharing stories about students and themselves. In the process, several exemplary students were discussed, including one who had changed from a troublemaker to a high achiever nearly overnight. In doing so, the student overcame substantial family and learning problems.

The story-telling session inspired the teachers to plan an awards assembly to recognize all the exemplary students and share their stories with other students. The student who improves most receives a large brass eagle, engraved with his or her name. The eagle is passed on each year to the most improved student.

Legends tend to arise around an organization's heroic figures who embody the values that have made the company or school great. At Wal-Mart, employees know stories about founder Sam Walton. At IBM, stories of founder Thomas Watson, Sr., are legendary. Both "practiced what they preached." Their demonstrations of such values as staying close to the customer and valuing employees make a lasting impression on those who work for the organizations.

Heroes. At Kennedy High School in New York City, principal Bob Mastruzzi used tales of heroes and their accomplishments to promote the values of inclu-

sion, diversity, and helping the less fortunate. As described by Sara Lawrence Lightfoot in *The Good High School*, Mastruzzi told Horatio Alger-type stories of students who overcame language or other barriers to achieve top ranks among peers. Such stories created role models for students of similar ethnic backgrounds or personal circumstances to show that they, too, could excel.

Mastruzzi often mentioned special academic programs at Kennedy High and the faculty that developed them. This attention communicated that curriculum and instruction were the most important aspect of school, and Mastruzzi's willingness to give credit reinforced the important contributions of individual faculty members — the "heroes" of that school.

Celebrating an organization's "heroes" serves at least two purposes: student and employee success stories are models that can serve as an inspiration and an example for others to emulate. Also, the recognition and honor bestowed on the hero or heroine serves as a positive reinforcement for the kinds of accomplishments the organization would like all students and staff to strive for.

Parallels Between Effective Schools and Organizations

Effective schools	Effective organizations
Coherent ethos with agreed-upon ways of doing things; agreement on instructional goals.	Strong culture with shared ways and values and a consensus on "how we do things around here."
Importance of principal as leader.	Importance of leader as hero or heroine who embodies core values, or who anoints other heroic figures.
Strong beliefs about teaching and learning.	Widely shared beliefs about the organization's mission.
Teachers as role models; students with positions of responsibility.	Employees as situational heroes or heroines who represent core values.
Ceremonies, traditions, and rituals centered on events such as greeting students in the morning, the first day of school, and graduation.	Ceremonies, traditions, and rituals centered on events such as greeting employees in the morning, opening a new plant, and the retirement of a senior executive.
Orderly atmosphere without rigidity; accountability without oppression.	Balance between innovation and tradition, autonomy and authority.
Teachers involved in technical decision making.	Employee participation in decisons about their own work.

Rituals and ceremonies

Rituals and ceremonies provide a positive, periodic way for an organization to celebrate and reinforce its values for key audiences, such as employees whose performance is tied to tangible outcomes. For example, IBM brought together top sales staff annually at a conference designed to build camaraderie and pride. The program honored top performers and celebrated the computer company's rich tradition of success.

The annual IBM meeting was a powerful ritual that built pride among participants, and a feeling of belonging to something larger than oneself. It brought together people who worked in different

parts of the country who might otherwise not have contact or feel a kinship with one another. These intangible, psychic rewards can be every bit as motivating — if not more motivating — than annual bonuses and other monetary recognition.

Many school principals have recognized the importance of ceremonies when their buildings are scheduled to close due to declining enrollment. Some appoint broad-based committees to plan an elaborate closing ceremony to celebrate the life of the school. These committees may work for many months during the last year of the school's life.

"Going Out in Style." In one such incident, when Montgomery Hills Junior High School in Silver Spring, Maryland, was about to close because of declining enrollment, Principal Carl Smith decided to make the event one to remember. The result was a celebration called "Going Out in Style," which culminated with an assembly that glorified the school's rich heritage. It helped the staff and students end the year on a high note in what otherwise could have been a negative and depressing experience. The event reaffirmed that the students and staff of that school had value, and the spirit of the school would live on in their new buildings.

In a similar situation, where a school was closed because of its age and consolidated with a newer one, the celebration ended with a parade to the new school where the two student bodies and faculties were joined in a show of unity and dedication to future success.

Rituals can be weekly staff meetings or a principal's habit of spending time in the halls where students can leave class to show off their work. Ceremonies can be formal annual events like high school graduation or a fun project such as a school carnival. The activities take on symbolic importance when they are used, consciously or subconsciously, to reaffirm key values of the organization or its leader.

Raw egg drop. At Jefferson Elementary School in rural Nevada, the culmination of the annual carnival comes when principal Ray Murdock flies over the school and drops raw eggs from a plane. The eggs have been encased in elaborate packaging devised by the students. The goal, of course, is to see how many eggs survive the fall.

The carnival involves parents and children in a fun, family-oriented event in a town where parental involvement had been low because of a transient population. The egg drop is a dramatic way to showcase student ingenuity, which reinforces Murdock's goals of increasing student self-esteem and achievement.

The annual event has several benefits. It strengthens bonds between school and community, raises funds for support of instruction, and provides a fun opportunity for the community to come together for a positive purpose.

CHAPTER THREE

Leadership

THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT

Leadership is a critical factor in shaping and maintaining positive school climates and constructive school and district cultures. Particularly in times of turbulent change, it is essential for school leaders to acquire and refine a variety of skills. The leader must develop a vision and articulate it to the school community. The administrator also needs insight into the culture of the school to determine which values and assumptions should be reinforced and which should be changed for the organization to reach its goals.

An AASA survey for this book asked superintendents and principals, "What will kill a climate faster than anything else?" and "What will restore a climate faster than anything else?" The open-ended questions elicited a variety of responses. The most frequently mentioned dealt with leadership — particularly at the school level, but also at the district level on the part of the board and superintendent (see a list of responses is on page 24).

While most responses dealt with the need for visionary leadership and a clear direction, the need to include staff and community in decision making was another strong thread among the answers.

Of course, maintaining good relations with staff and community is a two-way street, requiring cooperation and good will on both sides. And funding problems mentioned by some respondents made it obvious that leadership skills in many districts are being put to severe tests.

In the face of such challenges, however, respondents underlined the importance of communication and collaboration in building strong climates.

EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP

University of Texas Professors John E. Roueche and George A. Baker, III, undertook in 1985 an in-depth study of middle, junior, and senior high schools that had been cited by the Secondary School Recognition Program of the U.S. Department of Education. They discovered a number of variables in climate that characterized the "excellent" schools, as well as analyzed common traits among the principals.

As a benchmark, they began with the seven leadership traits identified by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman in *In Search of Excellence*, a study of high-performing companies. The leadership traits of the successful corporate executives were:

- **A bias for action.** Moving ahead, rather than studying an issue extensively.
- **Staying close to the customer.** Keeping the focus on what the consumer wants.

- **Autonomy and entrepreneurship.** Allowing operating units some flexibility and encouraging innovation.
- **Productivity through people.** A belief that employees are an organization's most important resource.
- **Hands-on, value driven.** Basic beliefs that guide major decisions.
- **Stick to knitting.** Focus efforts on what the organization does best, rather than spreading itself too thin.
- **Simple form, lean staff.** Avoiding ponderous bureaucracies.
- **Simultaneous loose-tight properties.** A "tight" commitment to core values while allowing individual initiative ("loose" control).

Roueche and Baker found effective school leaders shared many leadership qualities with successful corporate executives. As the study progressed, they modified those leadership qualities, incorporating a focus on teaching and learning as a key principle. They compared the Peters and Waterman principles with their own in the book, *Profiling Excellence in America's Schools*, for AASA.

Flexibility in leadership

Running an organization as complex as a school or school system requires a leader who is flexible, one who can adapt to changing conditions. The effective leader exercises "loose-tight" control by communicating values and beliefs all should adhere to ("tight control"), such as the belief that all students are capable of learning.

The control is "loose" by permitting autonomy within broad guidelines. For example, the school may adopt the goal of increasing achievement in geography but leave to the geography teachers the task of deciding what changes will be made in instructional strategies and curriculum.

This mirrors the Peters and Waterman principle of autonomy and entrepreneurship. Roueche and Baker note that the best leaders also "are initiators who act

How to Make or Break a School Climate

Factors That Will Kill a School Climate	Factors That Will Restore a School Climate
Lack of leadership	Sense of direction
Lack of vision, mission, goals	Attitude of principal
Absence of clear purpose	Positive board support
Poor school management and communication	Consistency and credibility
Unfair enforcement of rules	Positive, knowledgeable, energetic and communicative leader
Poor working relations between school and community	Removing fear and rewarding risk taking
Abundance of unreasonable rules	Positive, honest, exchange of ideas
Autocratic administration	Integrity
Board of education that has personal agendas	Trust
Demanding teachers union that puts kids second	Teacher empowerment
Open controversy between "stakeholders"	Leadership teams working on exciting, clear goals for student success
Leaving parents and students out of communication links	Allowing time for staff to identify, discuss and internalize mission, beliefs and goals of the school
No community support	Good teacher negotiation sessions
Stagnation, top-down management	Collaboration of individual groups
Non-collaborative, non-cooperative behaviors by school leaders	Empower the students
Budget deficit	Feeling of involvement
Reduction in force	Mission and goals tuned into by community
Conflict over limited resources	Adequate funding
Strikes	Unified common goal of teaching staff
Loss of social and emotional togetherness	Addressing problems
Using data for evaluation of school personnel rather than school improvement	Communicating about problems

now, demonstrating 'a bias for action.'" Permitting autonomy within broad guidelines can boost teacher morale by giving them more control over their work, which contributes to a positive school climate.

The researchers gathered comments from teachers and principals at exemplary schools that illustrated these traits. For example, Harold D. Peterson, a teacher at nationally recognized Highland High School in Utah, said the school's principal, Delbert Fowler, "allows me great latitude in using my creativity and innovation as a teacher" and still maintains his position of authority in the school. "I believe that his ability to do this is inherent in his personality and is evident in the image he projects," Fowler continued. "I enjoy a sense of freedom in the classroom, but realize that he is at the helm and that there are guidelines within which I must function."

Fostering cohesiveness

In excellent companies, cohesiveness is fostered through an emphasis on core values that are communicated regularly to the staff. Similarly, extraordinary principals "promote cohesiveness within schools by providing support and understanding to the staff by maintaining an open door, and by remaining visible around the school in a supportive rather than a supervisory role," Roueche and Baker explained. "Many seek to establish a family atmosphere. Others encourage open dialogue and frequent communication, but in a more businesslike manner."

Teachers in effective schools commented on methods their principals used to promote pride, a feeling of belonging or unity, and confidence about the school.

Don Deller, principal of Westchester Middle School in Chesterton, Indiana, is "never too busy to listen to one of his staff members or students," said teacher Victoria Brock.

"Taken individually, very few teachers on this faculty could be called outstanding," said Angie Mitchell, another Westchester teacher. "Most of us are adequate on a good day. Yet Dr. Deller somehow inspires us to aspire to greater things. He has taken us to the top of the mountain."

Relating Principles of Leadership to Principal Characteristics

Peters and Waterman Principles	Roueche and Baker Principal Characteristics
A bias for action Simultaneous loose-tight properties Autonomy and entrepreneurship	Flexibility in autonomy and innovation
Hands-on, value-driven	Cohesiveness within the organization Commitment to school mission
Productivity through people	Recognition of staff Problem solving through collaboration
Simple form, lean staff Close to the customers Stick to the knitting	Effective delegation Focus on teaching and learning

Commitment to mission

Just as CEOs of top-performing companies send a strong message about core values, outstanding principals convey a commitment to the mission of the school. They do this by modeling exemplary behavior and promoting a vision for the school that binds the staff together in a common cause. This kind of behavior fills an important role in shaping the culture by setting the standard by which future decisions are measured.

The most common vision shared by principals in the Roueche-Baker study was a commitment to quality education for every student. The administrators exemplified this commitment in their daily contacts with staff, students, parents, and the community. Such commitment to a mission brings stability to schools, the authors noted.

JoAnn Krueger, principal of

Manzano High School in Albuquerque, New Mexico, explained its importance this way:

"I feel a principal must make explicit what the mission of the school is. Then, every decision and behavior must be consistent with what you say the mission is. . . . The principal's vision is best communicated through directness, fairness and even-handedness — to the greatest degree possible."

Conversely, the lack of a clearly defined mission can have a negative impact on a school's effectiveness. Responding to AASA's survey on climate and culture, Saginaw, Michigan, Superintendent Foster Gibbs wrote, "Assuming that students, parents and staff do not fear for their personal safety, the major impediment to good student climate is lack of clearly defined and widely accepted mission and beliefs emphasizing learning for all students.

"Clearly defined and widely accepted," Gibbs continued, "implies that all decisions and actions in the school and district-wide are based on supporting the mission and beliefs, and that the school organization can respond when students don't learn."

Recognizing staff

Leaders shape school cultures by the things they pay attention to in the day-to-day life of an organization. Giving positive feedback to staff promotes an achievement-oriented culture by reinforcing behavior that should be encouraged. It also improves climate by focusing on the good things that are happening at school. Effective principals give positive reinforcement in several ways. They show appreciation informally through notes and positive comments, both privately and in staff meetings. Formal recognition can come in the form of certificates and awards and comments on evaluations.

> ***Leaders shape school cultures by the things they pay attention to in the day-to-day life of an organization.***

Such recognition fosters a positive climate by building morale; notes of appreciation, verbal praise, and awards demonstrate to staff members that they are important to the success of the school and that their efforts are noticed.

Such recognition also builds a positive culture by emphasizing the types of behavior the principal would like emulated, whether it is putting in long hours to make sure a holiday program for parents is top-notch or taking a risk in trying a new technique in the classroom. Even if the praise is delivered in private, the word gets around that the principal has noticed and rewarded the behavior.

Group problem solving

Staff recognition and group problem solving both relate to the Peters and Waterman excellence principles of "productivity through people." Involving teachers in critical decisions communicates that they have valuable ideas to contribute and that "several heads are better than one."

Problem solving also relates to a loose-tight management style. Once general guidelines are issued (tight), the principal should be willing to step back and accept the recommendations of the task force or committee unless there are new factors that must be taken into consideration.

When AASA asked administrators in the survey for this report what school improvement efforts had been undertaken in the previous year that had an impact on climate and culture, an emphasis on collaborative decision making and site-based management were among the most frequently mentioned.

"Departmental, committee and task force work are common means by which principals of outstanding schools achieve excellence and initiate change," wrote Roueche and Baker. They quoted Don Deller, former principal of Westchester Middle School in Chesterton. Indiana, on his philosophy regarding staff involvement in decision making:

> I believe it is essential to establish standing committees to deal with all aspects of the school. Further, such committees should be structured to involve people across departmental lines. This breaks down traditional tendencies for teachers to become isolated and possessive. When everyone has a stake in the operations and has a global perspective (like that of the principal), there is greater potential for everyone understanding and appreciating teaching-learning processes and other problems experienced in the various departments.

Effective delegation

Effective school leaders define tasks clearly and delegate effectively, which Roueche and Baker com-

pared to the Peters and Waterman principles of "keeping the form simple and the staff lean." Keys to success are to select the right number of staff members for the job and to match the individual strengths of particular staff members to the task at hand. Most leaders involve the minimum number necessary to preserve teacher time for preparation, delivery, and follow-up of instruction.

To make sure tasks and goals are clearly understood, most leaders break down projects into planning stages, then give examples and models to guide decisions and actions. Expected outcomes also are clearly stated. Karen Higgins, a teacher at Oaklea Middle School in Junction City, Oregon, described methods used by her principal, Sara Jane Bates:

"Timelines are set up to help simplify complex tasks. She gives the staff guidance and works with individuals or committees having problems. She often sets down parameters so we know the givens and what she can live with."

Focus on teaching and learning

While it may seem obvious that schools exist to promote teaching and learning, it is easy for administrators to get sidetracked by other demands on their time. However, principals of exemplary schools are unanimous in their determination to place academic concerns first and co-curricular and other activities second. This focus on learning mirrors the Peters and Waterman principles of successful companies that "stick to the knitting" and "stay close to the customer."

Another term for the primacy of learning is "academic press," which researchers define as the degree to which environmental forces "press" for student achievement on a schoolwide basis. In effective schools, teachers take responsibility for all students all of the time. In this way, students in the halls between classes are held to the same standards of behavior as students in classrooms.

Discipline shows

In an orderly climate, students aren't testing the limits all the time. They know what the limits are and they stay within them. Discipline is firm, fair, consistent, and quickly enforced.

Discipline is not an end in itself, but results from an overall climate and culture that stresses achievement and the importance of the task at hand. Don Deller explained the relationship of learning, an academically oriented culture, and positive climate this way:

> Teachers know that the number one objective is to ensure that students learn. However, attitude and learning climate have the greatest effect on whether students learn. I devote the majority of my energy to establishing a positive school climate . . . a place where students want to come . . . because 'something great is going to happen to me today and I don't want to miss it,' and a place where teachers enjoy coming to work because 'it's fun to be with the people in the building.

At Westchester, the goal was a climate in which students see teachers as caring for them as individuals. "When students know teachers genuinely care about them," former principal Deller continued, "they are more positively receptive to learning, guidance, and other efforts made *with* teachers to pursue excellence."

MULTIPLE SKILLS

As the previous examples illustrate, school principals need to master a variety of roles and skills because the nature of their job is complex and demanding. They must have good human relations skills to make staff and students feel valued and for parents to feel welcome in the school. They need good technical skills to make sure the school runs smoothly — that books are ordered in time for arrival at the beginning of the year and that schedules accommodate the sometimes conflicting needs of staff and students.

Principals also need strong educational skills, including a knowledge of teaching methods and how children learn. They should serve as the instructional leader, encouraging teachers to expand their individual repertoire of teaching strategies to best meet the needs of an increasingly diverse group of children. These skills are necessary to have a *good* school. But if the school is to be *excellent,* even more is needed.

Those additional skills include having a vision and being able to communicate that vision, and motivating staff and students to a larger purpose beyond themselves. For such efforts to be successful, the staff and students must feel part of the cultural fabric of the school. And the culture must be constructive. To achieve excellence, administrators must also fulfill symbolic and cultural leadership roles.

The principal's roles

University of Illinois Professor Thomas Sergiovanni has defined five discrete roles principals must play to satisfy these needs:

1. **Technical.** Planning, organizing, coordinating.
2. **Human.** Managing people and their relationships.
3. **Educational.** Diagnosing problems, supervising.
4. **Symbolic.** Focusing attention on what is important.
5. **Cultural.** Shaping and reinforcing the culture.

"The symbolic leader assumes the role of 'chief,' and by emphasizing important goals and behaviors, signals to others what is of importance and value," Sergiovanni wrote in *Educational Leadership.* "Providing meaning and rallying people to a common cause constitute effectiveness in symbolic leadership."

"The cultural leader assumes the role of 'high priest,'" Sergiovanni continued, "seeking to define, strengthen, and articulate those enduring values, beliefs and cultural strands that give the school its unique identity."

"Culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin," wrote Edgar Schein in *Organizational Culture and Leadership.* Leaders help to create culture by articulating values to guide the organization, and through concrete actions that serve as models of how tasks are to be completed. As the organization confronts crises, the leader transforms culture through decisions and actions that either turn basic beliefs into deeply held assumptions or alter beliefs to match new realities. When aspects of the culture become dysfunctional, leaders must destroy those elements by helping the group to unlearn some of its cultural assumptions and learn new ones. Because leaders play such a pivotal role in shaping the deeply held convictions shared by members of an organization, Schein concluded: "The unique and essential function of leadership is the manipulation of culture."

> ***The cultural leader assumes the role of "high priest," seeking to define, strengthen, and articulate those enduring values, beliefs, and cultural strands that give the school its unique identity.***

BUILDING THE CULTURE

Principals and superintendents build a cultural legacy by the actions they take to reinforce core values for the school or district. The amount of time and energy devoted to aspects of the school demonstrates what each leader considers important. Other values can be communicated less often, but through a highly visible, symbolic act.

Principal Bob Mastruzzi valued cultural diversity in the New York City high school he helped to open. He communicated this value by promoting the idea of "ethnic clubs" to celebrate the different backgrounds of students in the school. Mastruzzi also told stories of students who overcame language or cultural barriers to achieve success.

When Richard Koeppe was superintendent of the Cherry Creek School District outside Denver, he communicated the value that all employees and all jobs were important by spending one day a year working in another job in the district. He not only spent a day in the classroom — he worked on the cafeteria line and did maintenance on district buses.

Having a vision

It is through vision that a leader can mobilize students and staff to believe in themselves, to be excited about their work, and to strive for excellence. Principals are not the only ones who can originate positive visions. Master teacher Jaime Escalante, whose work was portrayed in the movie, *Stand and Deliver*, motivated his inner-city math students to excel because he had a vision of excellence and convinced the students that they could meet their goal of passing the advanced-placement calculus test.

Their success was electrifying, inspiring students in later classes to strive and meet the same goal.

Similarly, outstanding principals have been able to turn around achievement in inner-city schools by communicating the vision that all children can learn and by motivating staff to take the kinds of actions necessary to make that vision a reality.

Culture should match

Such vision can only be successfully implemented if the message is received by a receptive culture. For this to happen, the culture must be open to change itself and it should support the kinds of innovation being sought.

If, for example, the principal wants to implement shared decision making, the culture needs to support the

Leadership Roles and Excellence in Schooling

Force	Leadership Role Metaphor	Theoretical Constructs	Examples	Reactions	Link to Excellence
1. Technical	"Management engineer"	• Planning and time management technologies • Contingency leadership theories • Organizational structure	• Plan, organize, coordinate, and schedule • Manipulate strategies and situations to ensure optimum effectiveness	People are managed as objects of a mechanical system. They react to efficient management with indifference, but have a low tolerance for inefficient management.	Presence is important to achieve and maintain routine school competence but not sufficient to achieve excellence. Absence results in school ineffectiveness and poor morale.
2. Human	"Human engineer"	• Human relations supervision • "Linking" motivation theories • Interpersonal competence • Conflict management • Group cohesiveness	• Provide needed support • Encourage growth and creativity • Build and maintain morale • Use participatory decision making	People achieve high satisfaction of their interpersonal needs. They like the leader and the school and respond with positive interpersonal behavior. A pleasant atmosphere exists that facilitates the work of the school.	
3. Educational	"Clinical practitioner"	• Professional knowledge and bearing • Teaching effectiveness • Educational program design • Clinical supervision	• Diagnose educational problems • Counsel teachers • Provide supervision and evaluation • Provide inservice • Develop curriculum	People respond positively to the strong expert power of the leader and are motivated to work. They appreciate the assistance and concern provided.	Presence is essential to routine competence. Strongly linked to, but still not sufficient for excellence in schooling. Absence results in ineffectiveness.
4. Symbolic	"Chief"	• Selective attention • Purposing • Modeling	• Tour the school • Visit classrooms • Know students • Preside over ceremonies and rituals • Provide a unified vision	People learn what is of value to the leader and school, have a sense of order and direction, and enjoy sharing that sense with others. They respond with increased motivation and commitment.	Presence is essential to excellence in schooling, though absence does not appear to negatively impact routine competence.
5. Cultural	"High priest"	• Climate, clan, culture • Tightly structured values–loosely structured system • Ideology • "Bonding" motivation theory	• Articulate school purpose and mission • Socialize new members • Tell stories and maintain reinforcing myths • Explain SOP's • Define uniqueness • Develop and display a reinforcing symbol system • Reward those who reflect the culture	People become believers in the school as an ideological system. They are members of a strong culture that provides them with a sense of personal importance and significance and work meaningfulness, which is highly motivating.	

From: "Leadership and Excellence in Schooling" by Thomas Sergiovanni, in *Educational Leadership*, February 1984.

When compiling a history, particular attention should be paid to times of crisis when patterns of behavior and events create a bigger impression on people. A school may have had to close suddenly and temporarily — due to a fire or flood — dispersing teachers and students to other schools. If those teachers made a special effort to keep in touch during the transition, the crisis may have brought them closer together.

idea of working together. "If the culture is non-collaborative," University of Wisconsin Professor Kent Peterson said in an interview, "if the school is a 'hotel for teachers' where people work alone, shared decision making will run counter to the culture."

Unless the principal is aware of this cultural bias against collaborative decision making, he or she will lack the means to successfully implement the innovation.

READING THE CULTURE

As a first step in implementing change, the principal must be able to read the culture. Such a study will reveal what the cultural norms are, which are good and should be nurtured, what is needed for the school to improve (vision), and — most important — whether the staff and community agree changes are needed. If that collective commitment to change is not present, the leader must first focus on building that consensus or deal with the inevitable conflict that will result.

Reading the culture requires watching, listening, interpreting—using all one's senses, including intuition. To get a handle on the personality of the school, principals need to study the school's past — the key events and individuals that have shaped the assumptions, norms, and values shared by those who work and study in the school.

One way to write the school's history is to recruit a group of teachers who have come to work there at different times during the school's existence. The group is asked to collect stories and pictures — symbols that have shaped the school's culture over decades.

"Stories are important," Peterson said. "They may not be ones that are shared all the time, but they're there in almost a preconscious state in a lot of schools."

Past is prologue

For example, some schools may have had open classrooms that were fairly chaotic. Teachers who were team teaching in an open classroom setting may have developed the belief that sharing teaching duties does not work. Thus, if the school is planning to undertake interdisciplinary instruction as part of a conversion to middle schools, the previous experience will make the staff unreceptive to the change. In that situation, building leadership will need to focus first on changing the cultural norm that says sharing teaching duties will not work.

When compiling a history, particular attention should be paid to times of crisis when patterns of behavior and events create a bigger impression on people. A school may have had to close suddenly and temporarily — due to a fire or flood — dispersing teachers and students to other schools. If those teachers made a special effort to keep in touch during the transition, the crisis may have brought them closer together. When the teachers are reunited in their renovated school, they will have a culture built on camaraderie and trust.

Even after a staff has been together for a long time in a reform effort, it may be necessary to reevaluate the culture. If, for example, there are changes in the school population, it may again be necessary to modify the culture to fit the new circumstances more closely.

Cultural players

Reading the culture also requires tuning in to key individuals in the school to find out what is happening below the surface.

In their book, *Corporate Cultures*, Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy identified the following cast of characters whose expertise should be tapped:

- **Priests.** Highly regarded individuals who are long-time members. They "minister" to the needs of the school, offer counsel to junior members, and preside over rituals.
- **Storytellers.** They recreate the past and bring to life current exploits through tales.
- **Gossips.** They keep everyone current on items of importance as well as trivia.
- **Spies and moles.** Informal power brokers who negotiate beneath the surface, mediating among

various power centers, such as a dispute over turf between high school departments. It is this underground system where much of the real work of the school is transacted.

SHAPING THE CULTURE

Once the principal understands the culture, he or she is in a position to shape it in subtle, intuitive ways. In *The Principal's Role in Shaping School Culture,* Deal and Peterson borrowed terms from anthropology to describe five roles principals must assume:

- **Symbol**. Affirm values through the way time is spent, behavior, clothing, and routines.
- **Potter**. Shape and be shaped by the school's heroes, rituals, ceremonies, and symbols.
- **Poet**. Use language to reinforce values and sustain the school's best image of itself.
- **Actor**. Improvise in the school's inevitable dramas.
- **Healer**. Guide the school through transitions and major changes.

Understanding symbols

Symbols are the vehicles that carry the meaning of culture to the members of the organization. Symbols can be physical objects, such as trophies or lapel pins. Stories — usually about individuals or events — also are powerful symbols. Like fables, the stories — whether legend or true — have a "moral" to communicate: a cultural value, such as an openness to new ideas.

Rituals also function as symbols. They can be formal ceremonies, such as graduation, or routine activities, such as parent-teacher conferences and staff meetings. The way such rituals are conducted communicates whether the culture of the school values diversity of opinion and parent involvement.

A principal's daily routine can take on symbolic importance if there is strong communication and agreement on the shared values of the school. For example, the principal's daily tour of the building can represent "an inspection" — looking for infractions of order — or it may symbolize that the principal is genuinely concerned and involved in the life of the school.

Reading the signals

The old saying, "Do as I say, not as I do," illustrates the power of everyday activities. Below are examples of what day-to-day activities can communicate.

- **The office**. Location, accessibility, decoration, and arrangement reflect the principal's values. Does the principal have student work on the walls? Degrees of accessibility are communicated by one principal who works from a desk near the school doorway while another works in an inner office protected by walls and a secretary.
- **Demeanor**. Types of clothing worn, gestures, and sense of humor signal the formality or informality of the principal.
- **Time and attention**. Where the principal spends time and attention communicates clearly what he or she values.
- **Appreciation**. Principals signal appreciation both formally through recognition and evaluations, and informally, through daily interactions. Allocation of space and resources are other ways principals transmit their values to the staff and community.
- **Writing**. The form, emphasis, and volume of memos and newsletters communicates as much about values as their content. Are they a source of inspiration and humor or a dry recounting of school policies and regulations?

Principal as potter

Like a potter working with clay, principals must shape school cultures patiently and with skill. Patience is required because school cultures are built in years, not months. One principal estimated that it takes eight to nine years to shape the culture of a school.

One reason for the long time frame is the need to recruit staff members who share the principal's vision. Another reason is that it takes time to build trust and credibility; skeptical teachers and other staff may need to be shown that the principal "walks her talk" — living by the same values that are expressed verbally.

The principal serves as a potter through the symbolic activities conducted during the year:

- **Articulating shared values**. Through stories and slogans like "every child a winner."
- **Celebrating heroes and heroines**. Honoring staff members and students who exemplify school values through outstanding effort or achievement.
- **Observing rituals and ceremonies in ways that reinforce values**.

Principal as poet

Principals serve as poets in the way they use language to communicate what is important at the school.

As previously mentioned, language can vary from touching stories to humorous memos. Words and images principals use to talk about the school or students convey feelings as well as ideas. A principal communicates one image of a school in the words: "The achievement scores of our school are above the norm" and a very different image by saying: "Our school is a special place to be."

Metaphors are another poetic device principals can use to communicate school values. The images of factory or family provide strikingly different ways for students, staff, and parents to picture their school. The degree of warmth and informality in such messages also affects the climate of the school.

Principal as actor

Culture has been described as theater — a stage on which important events are carried out. In schools, the drama is carried out in routine events — such as assemblies — and in crises, such as a student protest over a curriculum change.

Conflicts can serve as a form of theater with the potential to reaffirm or alter values. Events such as student walkouts or faculty disputes, and the way they are resolved — with referees, rounds, rules, and spectators — surface issues and values that are important to the group. How the school leader resolves the crisis also shapes the culture by reducing anxiety and bringing group members through a shared experience.

Principal as healer

Change can be stressful in an organization. In times of transition or crisis, the principal can play a healing role by using the symbolic role to help members adapt to change. Normal transitions include welcoming new employees and celebrating and acknowledging those who are retiring, particularly the legacy retirees will leave with the school.

When the transition is more traumatic, such as a school closing or death of a student or staff member, acknowledgment is even more important to help members of the school community cope with the loss. Again, the leader's actions during a crisis contribute to assumptions members of the group share. If the principal or superintendent respond to a death as a loss of "member of the family," such actions contribute to a positive climate and culture by reaffirming the notion that people are individuals who have value and should be remembered.

STRONG AND WEAK CULTURES

Cultures can be either strong or weak and positive or negative. Obviously, the ideal culture is strong and positive. In a strong culture, staff members clearly identify with the school's values, and the values support norms that are good for children. In a school with a norm for improvement, for example, staff members are open to new ideas that will make their classroom more effective. If the culture is a strong one, teachers returning from a workshop with new ideas will consistently find a receptive audience among their colleagues.

In a weak culture, there is little agreement or understanding among staff about what goals are desirable and what the group expectations are regarding teacher behavior. Energetic teachers who bring in good ideas must rely on themselves for motivation and support. Initiatives can die out as teachers run into difficulties and find no one who can help them problem-solve and work through the rough spots.

Cultures can also be strong and negative if the shared norms support values other than educational excellence. A negative norm, for example, would be avoiding changes that might add to the teacher's workload. Such a norm might place a priority on use of student work sheets that use answer keys and oppose greater use of essay questions. Although the essays would promote higher-order thinking and build writing skills, their use would be counter to the culture because they would be much more time-consuming to grade.

Positive norms

School effectiveness researchers have identified a number of positive characteristics that support school reforms focused on helping students succeed academically. Below are positive norms cited by a variety of experts, followed by hypothetical statements that express sentiments of a school faculty sharing these norms.

- **Collegiality.** Staff members are a team who will work together on common goals and support each other in times of need.
- **Improvement.** Teachers recognize that instruction can always be improved, that classrooms can become stagnant without new ideas.
- **High expectations.** Students can learn and do more than we have traditionally expected of them. Teach-

ers and students will be held accountable through regular evaluations of our work.

- **Risk-taking or experimentation.** It is good to try new things because that is the way teachers improve. Teachers are rewarded for trying to improve, even if all things they try are not successful.
- **Performance.** We're here to work hard and succeed. The children deserve no less than our best efforts.
- **Diversity of approaches.** It is important to offer a range of educational strategies to meet the varied needs of children.
- **Equity.** The district and school will analyze test data by race and gender to make sure the instructional program is meeting the needs of all students. Allocations of resources ensure that all children, including gifted and special education students, have their needs met.
- **Celebrating cultural diversity.** Schools need to show an appreciation for the ethnic groups populating the school. Even in a homogeneous school, the curriculum should communicate the contributions different cultures have made to the nation.
- **Trust and confidence.** Administrators and parents trust the abilities and professional judgments of the teachers. As such, new techniques in the classroom are welcomed and teachers are given discretion in the choice of instructional materials.
- **Openness to change.** New instructional methods are considered to keep the teaching fresh. Current methods may not meet the needs of all children, and the needs of children change over time.
- **Expanding one's knowledge base.** Researchers are gaining new understanding about the way children learn. Teachers know they can improve their teaching by reading and attending conferences to stay abreast of these new developments.
- **Recognition.** People work more effectively when they are recognized for their efforts. Good teaching may be honored formally by annual awards and informally by notes of appreciation. Such recognition shows that teaching excellence is valued.
- **Collaborative decisions.** Teacher input is sought on issues that are important. The involvement is meaningful, not just a superficial gesture. It communicates that teachers are professionals who have something valuable to contribute in decisions affecting themselves, instruction, students, and the school.
- **Primacy of instruction.** Administrators recognize that teaching and planning are the teachers' most important duties, so they seek to minimize the amount of paperwork and meetings required of teachers.
- **Support for improvement.** The district reserves scarce funds for staff development because of its commitment to helping teachers improve their skills.
- **Honesty and openness.** Staff members feel free to disagree, discuss, and resolve matters openly in a constructive manner.
- **Caring.** The staff at this school care for each other and find ways to communicate to colleagues that they are important.
- **Humor.** Humor is encouraged as a way to survive difficulties so we don't take ourselves too seriously.

Negative norms

Negative norms are shared expectations that place a higher priority on needs other than what's best for children.

Kent Peterson observes many classrooms and faculties through his position as a principal investigator with the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools at the University of Wisconsin. In an interview, he shared terms he has coined and drawn from the literature for negative norms to describe schools that do not place children's needs first.

They include:

- **Mediocrity.** The unstated assumption is that the staff is doing enough — that being average or just competent is fine. Such feelings are rationalized through statements such as "we don't have enough materials" or "these students are so disadvantaged, this is the best we can expect of them." It is the opposite of the norm of performance in which hard work and results are expected.
- **Individualism.** This norm, originally conceived by Dan Lortie at the University of Chicago, describes the teacher whose attitude is: "I'm here to work alone. I'm a professional and in charge of my classroom," Peterson said. Those holding such a belief are reluctant to share ideas, problems or solutions. This

Teacher input is sought on issues that are important. The involvement is meaningful, not just a superficial gesture. It communicates that teachers are professionals who have something valuable to contribute in decisions affecting themselves, instruction, students, and the school.

norm is the opposite of the norm of collegiality, which promotes sharing and problem solving.

- **Inertia.** The underlying belief is that things can't or shouldn't change. A teacher returning from a seminar enthusiastic about a new technique is greeted by statements such as, "We tried that in 1956. The kids won't appreciate it. It just won't work." As Peterson explained, "They find all sorts of ways to say 'don't change.'"

  When Peterson first started teaching, he took graduate courses in reading and would talk over lunch with fellow teachers about the ideas he was hearing in his classes. "Oh, are you having one of *those* discussions again?" some colleagues would say. "That's okay. I'll go eat somewhere else."

  "They weren't trying to be mean," he continued. "Over time, these teachers had developed a deep set of assumptions that things can or should not change. It may have been because their experiences at trying something new had been difficult. For whatever reasons, a newcomer proposing innovations ran counter to the culture at that school."
- **Avoidance.** The opposite of risk-taking, the norm of avoidance actively discourages experimentation. Similar to the norm of inertia, members of an avoidance culture would look for all the ways an innovation would fail, rather than succeed, in order to avoid having to change.

Watch for generalities

Cultures evolve over time through individual experiences and through events that are generalized. The incident of an angry parent making a scene over a policy or curriculum change can be generalized to a belief that "you can't work with parents. They're all trouble makers or they're only interested in their own child and not the larger interests of the school."

Read between the lines

Stories can be positive or negative, and both are powerful shapers of culture. For example, some schools tell stories of former students who achieve success in later life as a way to inspire current students and staff. "Stories help you organize what you see in a school," Peterson noted. "Members of the culture start to interpret the stories as supporting underlying beliefs such as 'these kids aren't good' or 'we have brilliant kids here.'

"Once a culture becomes set, they're harder to change," Peterson cautioned. "Positive cultures are more potent in maintaining quality and equity for students."

Reading a culture requires studying and understanding on several levels the assumptions and the working relationships at the school. The administrator needs to study what the underlying belief systems and expectations are, whether the norms are strong or weak, and whether the culture is positive or negative.

Cultures can be strengthened through all the symbolic actions discussed earlier in this chapter. A later chapter describes the steps involved in changing a negative culture and building support for the vision and values favoring improvement, collegiality, and performance.

CAUTIONS FOR LEADERS

The culture of an organization is a complex, dynamic phenomenon that does not lend itself to simple rules of thumb or characterizations. Organizational culture expert Edgar Schein cautions administrators to avoid certain misconceptions about culture as it functions in an organization. In his seminal work, *Organizational Culture and Leadership,* Schein outlined five hazards when dealing with culture:

1. **Don't oversimplify.** Managers have a tendency to downplay the significance of culture or to confuse it with other concepts, such as climate, values, or the philosophy of the school. "Culture operates one level below these others and largely determines them," Schein wrote. While administrators can manage climate and values, "it is not at all clear that the underlying culture can be managed in the traditional sense of management," he continued. Although culture cannot readily be changed, culture needs to be understood to determine what values, assumptions and philosophies are desirable and possible for a given organization.
2. **Don't overlook culture's role in mission and goals.** Another common mistake is to focus only on the interpersonal aspects of culture — how members of an organization communicate with each other and what signals and symbols are significant. What is far more important are the mission and goals of the organization. Focusing on interpersonal relationships and labeling them "the culture" can be a dangerous trap that draws attention away from shared basic assumptions about the nature of education, the mission of schools and other factors that have far

more influence on how effective the school or district will be in educating students.

3. **Culture controls the manager.** The culture of an organization serves as a filter that unconsciously shapes how the administrator sees and interprets events and relationships. In this way, the culture controls the administrator more than the administrator controls the culture. This is true to a greater extent for an administrator who "comes up through the ranks" of a school district than for one who comes from another district. But given the pervasive nature of culture and the difficulty of discerning its nuances, even principals and superintendents from outside the district will unconsciously be shaped by an existing culture. This is because all school districts share some basic assumptions about the purpose of schools. The new administrator also will be influenced by the expectations staff shares about their new chief.
4. **Don't assume there is a "correct" culture and that strong cultures automatically are better than weak cultures.** What is most important is a good match between cultural assumptions and environmental realities. Where a strong culture may have been good at one point, it may be a disadvantage when circumstances change because the positive norms may be negative norms in the new situation. A strong culture is more difficult to change because the assumptions are more deeply embedded and shared by the group members.
5. **All aspects of a culture are not necessarily relevant.** Culture has many aspects, but not all relate to the effectiveness of the organization. An administrator needs to be aware of the culture, but if there are problems, he or she must learn to focus on those aspects of the culture that relate to the problem, rather than be consumed with studying and changing the entire culture.

Managers need to understand the culture of an organization in the same way they understand their own personal strengths and weaknesses. An awareness of the culture and one's personal convictions and assumptions can help explain how personal and cultural biases contribute to mistakes when problems occur.

Culture helps interpret

Insight into the culture provides "another layer of explanation for why things do or do not work out," Schein explained. "When managers observe communication or problem-solving failures, when they cannot get people to work together effectively, they need to go beyond individual explanations. Often the problem is that those people started with different assumptions, different languages, and world views — in short, different cultures. Recognizing such cultural differences is essential, so that the manager can explain how things can go wrong even if everyone has the same good intentions to make them work."

The administrator may be able to bridge two cultures — such as mediating between faculties of a middle and high school. When the administrator is part of the culture in conflict, the task is more complex. It may require intervention from one outside the culture who can provide the perspective of an impartial third party.

This is a difficult task because the consultant must gain insights into the culture before he or she can serve as a bridge between conflicting factions.

SUPERINTENDENT AS CULTURE SHAPER

In many ways, it is harder to build culture at the district level because superintendents do not have the same kind of day-to-day contact with staff and students as do principals.

Superintendents, however, can have an impact on culture by fostering the development of belief statements that are shared districtwide. Symbolic acts also have the power to communicate strong cultural values.

For example, Appleton, Wisconsin, Superintendent Jerry Patterson demonstrated his commitment to the belief that every employee is important by abolishing preferential parking outside the central office building. Parking spots were only reserved for staff members who had to carry large objects and those who were in and out of the building frequently as part of their work.

"Staff members joked that the superintendent would regret this policy change when a board meeting fell after a big snowstorm," Peterson said in an interview. Sure enough, one of the first snowy board meetings was heavily attended and the superintendent had to park some distance away. "But he stuck by his decision because he was determined to communicate that everyone is valued."

"Flying cover"

"Superintendents and school boards need to encourage experimentation," Terrence Deal said in an inter-

view. Culturally, they need to change their mind-set or the way people think. "When a new principal tries something interesting, it kicks up some dust. Parents or teachers may complain and the school board comes down on the principal, killing the chance for any changes," he explained.

Instead, school leaders need to "fly cover" for principals and teachers when changes are underway to give the reformers a chance to succeed. "When the bombers come in, you need to have fighters overhead to provide cover," Deal explained. "The superintendent's role is to fly cover for the principals and the principal must fly cover for teachers and students."

> ***Just as principals have multiple roles that are both technical and symbolic, board members function on more than one level. They can play a technical role in reviewing concrete items such as operating budgets and construction projects. They can play a symbolic role in setting an expectation of excellence or supporting the tone established by the superintendent.***

"Administrators always want to encourage a positive climate, but during a big change, things will get worse before they get better," Deal continued. "If climate deteriorates, don't pull the plant up by the roots to see how it's doing. The real driving force in the institution is its long-term values and faith."

"Educators know a lot more than we think we know," he added. "If I had to write my own vision, we'd get the (state and federal) policy makers out of the business of trying to make things different and get people inside the schools — the students, teachers, parents, and board members — to begin to think about how we can create a place of quality here."

ROLE OF SCHOOL BOARD

Both in intentional actions and ongoing relations with the superintendent, school board members also play important roles as shapers of climate and culture. It is the board, after all, that adopts mission statements and goals that communicate beliefs on which cultures are based. They also endorse structural reforms that are carried out at the district and school levels.

Just as principals have multiple roles that are both technical and symbolic, board members function on more than one level. They can play a technical role in reviewing concrete items such as operating budgets and construction projects. They can play a symbolic role in setting an expectation of excellence or supporting the tone established by the superintendent.

A study of the school boards in exemplary districts found that effective boards were able to examine educational issues from a number of perspectives. "As a collective, board members were able to see the human, structural, political, and symbolic ramifications of policies, decisions, and public deliberations," wrote Lee Bolman of Harvard and Terrence Deal of Vanderbilt in a study for the U.S. Department of Education.

Roles affect school image. Bolman and Deal propose four roles for board members in terms of images the school districts project and the ethical challenges they present:

The district as a factory. Schools accept raw materials (students) on one end of the production line and graduate educated citizens at the other end. "Clear goals, rationality, specialization, and systematic evaluation are characteristics that are thought to move students through the grades with minimal disruptions and recognized efficiency," the authors explained.

In this setting, boards play the leadership role of *technical expert*, providing knowledge, analysis, and expertise to promote efficiency. Such a role is good where it provides leadership, but bad when it leads to micromanagement, the authors noted. The value to be promoted is excellence.

First, boards must model excellence themselves in the way they conduct meetings and relate to each other. Second, boards should act as catalysts setting high standards and keeping the focus on important educational goals, rather than side issues.

The school as a family. A school district is more like a family than a factory. "Ideally, it is a group of people who care about and support one another, who are linked by shared needs and personal relationships rather than by standardized rules and roles on an educational assembly line," Bolman and Deal continued.

In this context, the appropriate role is not of "parent," because that implies that principals and teachers are children. Instead, the authors adopted the term "servant leaders" who are effective "only to the degree that they serve the best interests of all the district's stakeholders

— teachers, administrators, parents, and above all, children."

From this perspective, the ethical responsibility of school boards is caring: showing concern, respect and love for each individual. As with excellence, school boards should model this value as well as expect it of district employees.

Unfortunately, many school boards fail to be good role models. They may argue among themselves, leak unfavorable information to the media about the superintendent or make insensitive remarks about students or staff members. Such actions can seriously undermine not only a board's credibility but the morale of the staff and, ultimately, community support for the district.

The school as a jungle. This metaphor is a political one. The image of school as a jungle reflects the political view that organizations are characterized by competing interests, scarce resources, and continuing differences.

Public school systems are a microcosm of the larger society. They are made up of subgroups with their own perspectives and special interests. Some perspectives are unique to education: groups championing the interests of special education or gifted students or the football program. Others are defined by race, gender, or ethnicity. Still other groups interact with the school board on the basis of their role within the system: students, teachers, parents, and administrators.

"When interests are diverse and resources are scarce, conflict is inevitable. The role for school boards in this context is as an advocate. "An effective advocate has a clear direction and agenda, a network of allies and supporters, and skills in negotiating," said Bolman and Deal.

The ethical obligation for school boards in this context is one of justice. "In a world of competing interests and scarce resources," they explained, "school boards have to make trade-offs. Board members must decide who gets what. In making such decisions, they must honor a value of fairness." Board members model fairness by committing to just and fair decision making in which the underlying value is providing quality education for all children.

Just and fair decision making does not imply that board members will always agree. As elected officials, they represent varied interests, perspectives, and commitments. "Dialogue and debate are essential and healthy in a democratic society if conducted with a shared commitment to justice and fairness," they noted. The danger is that diversity among board members will lead to deep divisions and enmities that prevent boards from serving as advocates for the best interests of children.

The school as a cathedral. Schools can be seen as "sacred places" in a number of ways:

- An expression of lofty goals.
- A monument to human faith and possibility.
- Home base for a group with shared values and beliefs.

In this context the role of board members is as "spiritual leader," not in a religious sense, but as concerned with the human spirit. Such leaders help people "find meaning and faith and confront fundamental human questions, such as 'what is the purpose in my life?' and 'what ethical principles should we follow?'" Bolman and Deal explained.

The ethical responsibility is to model and promote faith in human potential, the capacity of all children to learn and grow. It implies faith in teachers as professionals and as basic, decent human beings who will do the right thing for their students. This point of view honors autonomy rather than building record-keeping systems intended to "check up" on what teachers are doing. The spiritual leader role also implies faith in the community as one that wants what is best for all children.

In all school districts, students and staff will have moments of triumph and of frustration. As spiritual leaders, board members have the responsibility to model that faith in the importance of education and rally others who lose the faith due to discouragement or frustration.

Striking a balance

Board members are likely to view one or two of these leadership responsibilities as more valid than others, which can lead to misunderstanding and conflict. An advocate for excellence, for example, may see colleagues who champion caring as woolly-headed, while they view the excellence advocate as elitist.

The point is that all four roles have a place. Board members should recognize which of these roles most closely matches their orientation and respect those who see their responsibilities differently.

All board members face the dilemma of balancing their individual views against the concerns of the school district as a whole. "Boards with a shared set of values will find that balance much easier to manage," Deal and Bolman argued.

Leadership Roles and Ethical Responsibilities of School Boards

If your organization is:	Your leadership role is:	Your ethical responsibility is:
Factory	Technical expert	Excellence
Extended family	Servant	Caring
Jungle	Advocate	Justice
Cathedral	Spiritual leader	Promoting faith

Moral leadership

In the 1990s, Americans are recognizing the powerful role the entertainment industry plays in shaping negative values, such as violence, greed, and self-centeredness. In this context, it is even more important for school boards to consider their roles as moral leaders.

The danger with such a vision is that school boards will seek to define values narrowly, favoring one political or religious philosophy and imposing those views on others. The role of spiritual leader is a difficult one that carries pitfalls.

Care must be taken that the values adopted by the board are broad ones that all members of the community can support and that affirm the best human qualities. Values such as excellence, caring, justice, and faith have the broad-based kind of basic appeal that can unite communities rather than divide them.

The opportunities are there

Leadership at the board, superintendent, and principal levels presents powerful opportunities for shaping positive, achievement-oriented climates and cultures.

To harness and make the most of these forces, school leaders need to understand the role climate and culture play in the day-to-day interactions between students and teachers, teachers and principals, and parents and school administration and staff.

Leaders who just focus on the nuts and bolts of running a school or district and ignore the opportunities to use symbolism to inspire, motivate and build positive cultural values, will have a much more difficult time operating effective schools.

Beyond leadership considerations, there are structural changes and instructional techniques that help build positive climates and cultures. The next chapter describes the structural and organizational changes districts are making to forge effective climates and cultures. Chapter 5 describes a number of innovative strategies being used at the classroom level.

CHAPTER FOUR

Restructuring for Climate & CULTURE

Many school districts have found that the only changes in climate and culture that have long-term benefits for students and staff are those that examine and reorient the entire school system. The workings of school districts are so interrelated — staff development, curriculum, instruction, discipline policies — that it is necessary to make adjustments throughout the organization. Otherwise, "the old way of doing things" in one part of the organization can serve to frustrate and slow down improvements at the school level.

Superintendents responding to the AASA survey recommended a number of structural approaches to improving climate and culture. To the question, "What school district improvement efforts have been undertaken in the last 12 months that you believe have had an impact on the climate or culture?" the most common responses were:

- Emphasis on collaborative decision making
- Site-based management
- Districtwide strategic planning
- Staff development
- Curriculum revision
- Emphasis on total quality management
- Emphasis on multiculturalism.

Shared decision making

The value of shared decision making and the drawbacks of the traditional "top-down" approach were recurring themes among the respondents.

"Attempting to over-centralize management" inhibits the development of positive climates and cultures, according to Jayne Sargent, deputy superintendent of the 8,000-pupil, Meridian, Mississippi, School District. "I believe we best meet the needs of the students with site-based management."

Those respondents who conducted climate surveys said the results were used by school site teams to develop action plans addressing specific concerns or needs revealed in the surveys.

The teachers' voice

Teachers have been seeking a meaningful role in educational decisions for a number of years now. In 1982, two Yale University researchers studied sources of dissatisfaction among experienced Connecticut high school teachers. While the most pressing of these were the low status of teaching, inadequate salaries, and poorly motivated pupils, a number of factors also reflected on the relationships teachers had with their principals and other administrators.

Teachers' sources of dissatisfaction included:

- No teacher participation in decision making
- No recognition of extra work
- No teacher impact on school policy
- Lack of support from administration.

"Principals and other administrators need to develop more collaborative (as opposed to adversarial) relationships with teachers," wrote researchers Dennis C. Turk and Mark D. Litt in the study for the Connecticut State Department of Education.

They recommended workshops for administrators on communication training and problem solving. Conflict resolution skills are valuable as well. "Principals must become less autocratic and more democratic," they advised. "Inservice programs geared toward group problem solving should be examined, implemented, and evaluated."

> ***Principals must take the lead in having teachers design the program for students to achieve success in learning the curricular outcomes.***

DISTRICTWIDE SOLUTIONS

The kinds of structural changes districts are making to improve climate and culture exemplify the loose-tight management coupling described by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman in *In Search of Excellence.* Strategic planning can build districtwide support for values such as improvement and equity. Through strategic planning, staff, parents, and community members decide what the overall goals are. The goals are the "tight" side of the equation because all schools are working toward the same general targets.

When strategic planning is teamed with site-based management, individual schools are empowered to determine how best to meet those districtwide goals. The "loose" side of the excellence equation — giving leeway to local schools to shape solutions — fosters a positive climate and culture by giving teachers and administrators a voice in the changes and a stake in the success of the effort.

"Districts *must* work a program of site-based management," wrote Edward Bleeker, superintendent of the Ruthven/Ayrshire Community Schools in Iowa, in response to the AASA survey question, "What district-level policies and actions promote positive, achievement-enhancing climates and cultures?"

"Principals must take the lead in having teachers design the program for students to achieve success in learning the curricular outcomes," Bleeker continued. The process has led Ruthven/Ayrshire school staffs to ask for training in Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement, cooperative learning, mastery teaching, outcome-based education, and the State of Iowa Writing project.

The collaborative decision making and rich mix of staff development options has led to "a greater focus on student success with learning, better student achievement of curricular outcomes, better student attitudes, and a more confident and enthusiastic staff and community," Bleeker added. In short, the structural reforms and the way they have been implemented have promoted student success and positive climates and cultures.

Strategic planning

Strategic planning is a process by which key stakeholders of a school system — parents, teachers, administrators, community members — set goals and develop action plans. During this future-oriented process, participants examine problems and opportunities society and other levels of government may present that affect the ability of schools and educators to meet their goals. Plans are developed to accomplish goals with existing staff and resources in light of those external "threats and opportunities."

Another factor respondents mentioned as promoting a positive climate was "a sense of direction" with a school district or school. Strong leadership at the building level can lend such a sense of direction. But such effects can be enhanced when the school-based plans are developed in the context of the overall district goals, because all staff in the district are moving in the same direction.

Steps in Strategic Planning

In the Orange County, Florida, Public Schools, each school develops an annual strategic plan that complements goals set forth in the district plan. The nine steps used in developing a school's strategic plan are:

1. **Conduct external analysis.** Gather information on external forces that affect schools, such as the political climate, economic conditions and forecasts, new laws and regulations, crime rates, and social programs. From these forces, identify trends, issues, and events that can have an impact on schools. Orange County gives these examples:

   Trend — The growing cultural diversity in the community.

   Issue — The use of school facilities for health clinics.

   Event — The passage of the Florida School Improvement and Accountability Act.

2. **Conduct internal analysis.** Gather information on internal strengths and weaknesses in relation to external forces. Include information on students, student outcomes, staff, parents, facilities, financial resources, equipment, supplies, and, other resources.

   For the external trend on increasing cultural diversity in the community, the corresponding internal information gathered might include the number of children by grade who are non- or limited-English speaking.

   Orange County uses separate school effectiveness questionnaires for students, staff, and parents to gather some of this information. Examples of these surveys are included in the chapter on measuring climate.

3. **Formulate assumptions about the future.** Prepare statements of expected conditions in the future and their possible impact on the school. The assumptions may be adapted from district assumptions or be unique to the local school. In the cultural diversity example, a school assumption could read: "The growing cultural diversity in the community will make it increasingly challenging for the school to meet the academic, personal, and social needs of students."

4. **Develop/update the school profile and mission statement.** Describe the background of the school, the community, students served, staff, and special features of the school. The mission articulates the collective vision of the school, and provides a direction for school improvement.

   The mission statement should:

   - Give a clear and concise statement of the purpose of the school.
   - Focus on outcomes for students.
   - Provide a reference for setting improvement priorities.

5. **Generate, examine, and select alternative approaches.** Analyze the different ways the mission, external and internal data, and assumptions about the future can be addressed.

   Alternatives may be gathered by the strategic planning team or a wider audience, such as questionnaires or open

Checklist for Priority-Setting

As in brainstorming, a goal in identifying alternatives should be to develop a comprehensive list, followed by a rank ordering in terms of feasibility and desirability. Orange County recommends this checklist for ranking options:

- ✓ Is the preferred approach consistent with federal and state laws, rules and regulations, school board policy, and the district plan?
- ✓ Does the approach address the school mission, external and internal facts (including identified needs), and assumptions about the future?
- ✓ Will implementation of the approach produce results that will improve the school and the school system?
- ✓ Is the approach feasible in terms of human and material resources, organizational structure, and political climate?
- ✓ Does the approach represent a new or improved initiative for the school?

Steps cont.

meetings including parents, community members, other school staff, and students. The Orange County handbook gives the following sample alternatives to address the cultural diversity trend:

- Cultural awareness inservice for staff.
- Curriculum that incorporates cultural diversity.
- School activities that celebrate different cultures and languages.
- Instructional strategies and learning activities that stress cultural diversity.
  - — Night classes for non-English speaking parents.
  - — Announcements, signs, and newsletters in different languages.
  - — Involvement of volunteer adults and students who speak both English and a foreign language.

6. **Develop strategic objectives.** Draft statements of long-range outcomes that address external and internal data, communicate priorities for improving the school, and extend two or more years into the future. The objective should be measurable, a high priority, feasible to implement, and include a target date for achievement.

   A strategic objective addressing cultural diversity might read: "To improve communications among staff, students, and parents by developing, implementing, and evaluating multicultural programs by June 30, 1997."

7. **Develop annual operating objectives.** Draft statements of what will be accomplished in one fiscal year to help achieve a multiyear strategic objective. There may be more than one annual objective for each strategic objective. In the multicultural example, the one-year objective might be "to improve communications with non- and limited-English speaking students and parents by June 30, 1997."
8. **Develop action plans.** Define in chronological order the major projects planned to achieve annual operating objectives, dates for completing projects, and the names of persons with overall responsibility for conducting activities.
9. **Compile, adopt, and disseminate the strategic plan.** Share drafts of the plan as it develops with the planning team and staff. Once it is adopted, the leadership team should look for frequent opportunities to share the key points of the plan — through newsletters, reports and meetings — with staff, students, parents and the community.

School Strategic Plan (Sample Page)

Goal: To enhance involvement in the educational process and communications among students, staff, parents, the school board, and the community, and to improve multicultural relations.

Strategic Objective:
To improve communications among staff, students, and parents by developing, implementing, and evaluating multicultural programs by June 30, 1997.

Annual Operating Objective:
To improve communications with non- and limited-English speaking students and parents by June 30, 1995.

Action Plan

Activities and Timelines	Responsibility/Contact
1. Recruit, train, and begin involving some bilingual volunteers by August 20, 1994.	Principal
2. Select and orient a multicultural committee by September 30, 1994.	Principal
3. Conduct additional recruitment and trainng of volunteers by October 31, 1994.	Chairperson
4. Report on volunteer activities by January 31, 1995.	Chairperson
5. Assess and report on improved communications and non- and limited-English speaking students and parents by June 12, 1995.	Principal

EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS AND PLANNING

One promising technique used by individuals interested in school-based management is a step-by-step approach to designing a reform based on the precepts from effective schools research. The five-step process involves a cross-section of the school staff in setting goals and developing a plan to improve student performance based on identified needs.

In this process, improving school climate would only be a goal if specific needs were identified. Instead, a good climate would be a by-product because the planning actively involves interested members of the school staff. Any changes needed in the underlying culture would be identified as the planning team's research uncovered specific assumptions that were impeding progress by students. Changing those assumptions would become one goal of the improvement plan.

"The ultimate purpose of the school improvement process is to affect student learning by changing the culture of the school," Lawrence Lezotte and Barbara Jacoby wrote in their book, *A Guide to the School Improvement Process based on Effective Schools Research.*

"Cultural change takes time, tends to occur in a 'million little actions' and is clearly incremental," they explained. Key to changing the culture are nine "strategic assumptions" that must be embraced by all stakeholders.

The process of school improvement as described by Lezotte and Jacoby has five discrete stages that build upon each other, although some stages may overlap.

Strategic Assumptions of the Effective Schools Process

1. In the future, even more than in the past, all schools will be expected to focus on teaching for learning as their primary mission.
2. In the future, even more than in the past, schools will be held accountable for measurable results or practical student outcomes.
3. Educational equity will receive increasing emphasis as the number of poor and minority students continues to increase in proportion to the rest of the population.
4. Decision making will be more decentralized as the individual school is recognized as the production center of public education and, therefore, the strategic unit for planned change.
5. Collaboration and staff empowerment must increase if building-level staff are going to become meaningfully involved in the planning, problem solving, and evaluation of their school's programs.
6. Schools will make changes that empower teachers to be responsible for student learning, based on practices that have been proven effective through research and experience.
7. Technology will be used to monitor the effectiveness of instruction by more quickly informing teachers and administrators of student performance.
8. School administrators will be expected to demonstrate skill both as efficient managers and effective visionary leaders.
9. By emphasizing student outcomes, schools will be able to loosen the prescriptions of the teaching process, thus leading to school restructuring.

In the future, even more than in the past, all schools will be expected to focus on teaching for learning as their primary mission. Schools will be held accountable for measurable results or practical student outcomes.

1. **Preparation.** Introducing the effective schools process and developing consensus that change is needed.
2. **Focus.** Reaching agreement on the mission of the school and student outcomes to be reached.
3. **Diagnosis/Interpretation.** Studying current student outcomes and what organizational changes are needed to make improvements.
4. **Plan Development.** Developing specific objectives and strategies to carry out improvements and seek consensus.
5. **Implementation/Evaluation.** Training all staff, creating new cultural norms to sustain change, monitoring and evaluating programs.

Note that the stages are represented as a circle, indicating that improvement is a continuous process. One important new cultural norm is that schools and educators can always be better. To acknowledge this is not to say there is something "wrong" with the way things have been done in the past. It does suggest, however, that professionals are those who are willing to keep abreast of research and question old ways of doing things to continually increase their effectiveness.

The circular, self-renewing aspect ensures that new teachers are brought along as they arrive, imparting the belief system as well as the techniques. Ongoing examination also ensures that those who have been part of the school over time do not get complacent, but remain challenged to do better. These stages are detailed over the next several pages.

THE PREPARATION STAGE

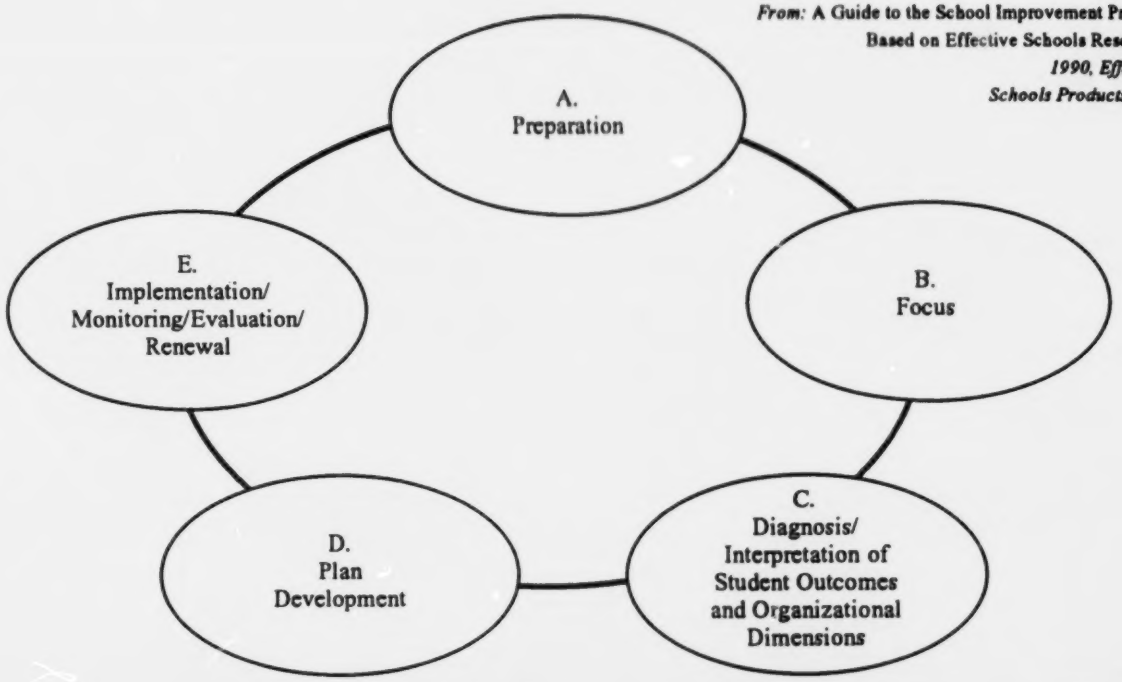
The preparation stage contains three steps that lay the groundwork for change:

- Orienting for staff, students, parents, and community to effective schools.
- Forming the School Improvement Team.
- Training the School Improvement Team.

Experts stress that it is important to allow enough

Stages in the School Improvement Planning Process

From: A Guide to the School Improvement Process Based on Effective Schools Research, *1990, Effective Schools Products, Ltd.*



time to orient staff and students to the process — up to several months for a large secondary school. Reformers also should allow enough planning time so that no one feels that the resulting plan is engineered by a subgroup and imposed on everyone else. The way to do this is to involve students, parents and community — through subcommittees, surveys or meetings — in contributing to the plan.

Selecting team members

School-based teams should include a cross section of the school community, including teachers, nonteaching staff, the principal, and a parent or community representative. Students may be members at the secondary level. Including a cross section is important to maintaining a positive climate during the planning process and to ensuring acceptance of the final product by giving all groups a voice.

CHOOSE A FOCUS

The next stage of implementation involves developing a mission statement for the school, which provides a focus for all school improvement efforts. The statement describes what the staff cares most about and leads to the description of learner goals and expected student outcomes. Because the statement reflects the beliefs and values of the school, crafting the statement is an important step in acknowledging or reshaping the culture of the school.

"The energy for internal school renewal comes from the discrepancy that the members of the school community feel between where they are and where they would like to be — the ideal," wrote Jacoby and Lezotte. "Consensus on the mission is critical to the long-term success of the process."

Development of the mission statement provides an opportunity to get suggestions from staff and parents on what it should contain. While mission statements vary, they should address: who will deliver educational services, who will benefit, what constitutes observable evidence that objectives have been reached, and what is the level of accountability.

Define outcomes

The next step is to build on the mission statement by defining the specific skills and student outcomes desired, how mastery will be determined, and what categories will be identified for monitoring and evaluation. For example, if the mission statement calls for

Common Planning Periods Lead to Creative Assignments

One strategy for personalizing education follows the middle school model of organizing students into blocks for their core subjects. Four teachers will have the same 120 students. In their common planning period, they can develop interdisciplinary projects.

At Smiley Middle School in Denver, the social studies and English teachers for a team of gifted students planned research papers on Latin American countries, one of five overall themes for the year. The teachers were able to use the flexibility of block scheduling to take the students to the main public library downtown, where they learned to use the periodical index to research their countries. Students received English grades for the research paper's composition, footnotes, and bibliography. They received social studies grades for the content.

Adding a playful note, the teachers culminated the unit with a "Jeopardy!"-style competition. Students were asked to turn in 10 questions and answers from the research on their country. The questions were compiled and students studied to compete in teams on the information. Students were graded on the quality of the questions they turned in, not the performance of their team.

The competition was just for fun. The students prepared and competed with gusto, enjoying a whimsical ending to an otherwise highly challenging assignment.

mastery of reading skills, a school may define mastery as having 80 percent of the students score 75 percent on teacher-developed tests.

Develop objectives

School reformers identify two key standards for measuring effectiveness: quality and equity. According to the National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development, "The quality standard assures that the overall level of achievement in a school is high. The equity standard assures that the high achievement does not vary significantly across the subsets of race, gender, and socioeconomic status of the school's student population."

Identifying subpopulations and examining their school performance often brings home to school staff that the current program is not meeting the needs of all students. The study not only provides useful information, it also builds support for change.

The team must first identify which subgroups in the school it will study. Then, standardized test scores and other factors, such as absenteeism and suspension and retention rates, are examined to see how effectively the school is meeting the needs of all its students.

Key categories. Experts caution that it is best to select a few key categories to study in depth rather than try to study every possible subgroup in the school. Research identifies three factors that consistently are associated with student achievement: race, gender, and socioeconomic status (though it has not answered "why" this is so).

What size group is needed? Distortions may occur in studying groups that comprise less than 15 percent of the school population because the number of students may be too few to be statistically valid.

Possible alternatives in studying a small number of minority students would be to cluster members of two minority groups to compare their school performance their with that of the majority. Care must be taken, however, to be sensitive to the many factors underlying achievement. It can be politically as well as educationally unsound to make assumptions on performance based on race and gender.

Another strategy is to combine grade levels, such as the performance of ninth- and tenth-graders, or to look at test scores over two to three years for evidence of a trend.

Based on the original effective schools research, socioeconomic status is the strongest predictor of student success in school. According to Lezotte and Jacoby, the preferred indicator of socioeconomic status is parents' educational level. If schools can obtain this information from parents, it remains relatively stable and is easy to monitor.

Mission Statement for Orange County School District Orlando, Florida

The safeguard of freedom in a democracy is an educated citizenry and free public education is the primary means for meeting this essential need. The ability to meet this need is both more important and more difficult in this time of rapid advances in technology, extensive and fundamental changes in the fabric of our society, the emergence of a globally interdependent world, and severe environmental problems. Thus, the demands for more and better education have never been greater for our nation, the state of Florida, and the Orange County Public Schools. The following statement expresses the mission of the school system as we strive to meet these special challenges:

The mission of the Orange County Public Schools is to enable all students to achieve academic and vocational success.

The mission of the Orange County Public Schools is to enable all students to achieve academic and vocational success, develop self-respect, and understand and appreciate others through the placement of competent and caring teachers in every classroom and the provision of necessary support services.

The key is to choose a manageable number of variables and monitor student performance in those categories over time. It is only through ongoing monitoring and evaluation that the team can determine whether school improvement strategies are making a difference for those students whose needs were not being met.

DIAGNOSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Once the categories of student subgroups are selected, the team must determine what level will be considered mastery for various measurements. Next comes the actual analysis of test scores to set up comparisons by subgroup and achievement. This is referred to as "disaggregation of the data."

Once the scores are sorted, it is possible to identify discrepancies in meeting the needs of all students. Then it is possible to begin posing theories about why those results exist. Such an analysis also can check on the performance of high ability students. This will address concerns that effective schools focus on low achieving students and do not provide a challenging curriculum for high ability students.

Not just test scores

Experts caution that disaggregation of data helps identify the problem, not the solution. The analysis of the school population need not be limited to test scores. A fuller understanding of the situation can be obtained by looking at some or all of the following:

Student climate indicators

- Student conduct reports
- Participation in student activities
- Attendance
- Student awards
- Homework completion rates
- Surveys of staff and students.

Tests

- Standardized norm-referenced tests
- Teacher-made tests
- Criterion-referenced tests.

Other academic measures

- Letter-grade distribution
- Retention percentage, by grade level
- Student course selection (challenging vs. remedial)
- Student grade average.

Analyzing the organization

In addition to analyzing student performance, the data-gathering process requires teams to examine the school itself to see to what extent the correlates of effective schools are present. It is important to note that the effective schools research did not show that the correlates *caused* increased student achievement, but rather indicated that there is a strong *relationship* between the correlates of effective schools and achievement.

Some reformers have noted that the correlates are elements over which schools have some control. The school can't change the income level of the family, but it can positively influence achievement by creating a climate of high expectations.

Effective schools correlates that should be measured are:

- **Safe and orderly environment.** An orderly, purposeful, businesslike atmosphere is present. The school climate is not oppressive, but is conducive to teaching and learning.
- **Climate of high expectations for success.** The staff believes and demonstrates that all students can attain mastery of essential skills and that teachers have the capability to help all students do it.
- **Instructional leadership.** The principal effectively communicates the mission to parents, staff, and students and understands and applies characteristics of effectiveness in management of the instructional program.
- **Clear and focused mission.** The mission is clearly articulated regarding instructional priorities and assessment procedures; the staff accepts responsibility for students learning the essential skills.
- **Opportunity to learn/time on task.** Teachers allocate a significant amount of time to instruction in essential skills. For a high percentage of this time, students are engaged in whole class or large group, planned teacher-directed learning activities.
- **Frequent monitoring of student progress.** Academic progress is measured frequently through a variety of measures. Those results are used to improve individual student performance and the instructional program itself.
- **Home-school relations.** Parents understand and support the school's mission and are given the

Cautions on Restructuring

Several experts consulted for this report warned that schools must guard against doing reform for its own sake. The risk, when constituents are demanding change, is to look for a "magic bullet" that the district can import to make things better.

One problem with this approach is there is no one single answer that is appropriate for all situations. Instead, schools must tailor solutions that are appropriate to their own community. Even then, following a sound process such as site-based management can have pitfalls.

Researchers studying change in all types of organizations — including schools — have found that reforms fall into two categories:

1. Those that are *activities-driven.*
2. Those that are *results-driven.*

Activities-driven efforts may make changes that members of the organization feel good about, but follow-up research shows that student performance does not improve. Results-driven reforms, by contrast, select strategies that have a proven track record for improving educational outcomes.

"I think an awful lot of the attempts to go to site-based management are activities-driven," commented Lawrence Lezotte, senior consultant with the Effective Schools organization in Okemos, Michigan. Lezotte researched the characteristics of effective schools with Ronald Edmonds and now consults with schools and writes on school improvement based on effective schools research.

"You have to understand that the number of schools that are changing outcomes for kids is really a very small percentage of the total right now across the country," Lezotte said.

Why change relationships?

If site-based management is used primarily to change relationships between school staff members and principals, for example, Lezotte posed the question: "What is the theory of cause that changing the nature of teacher-principal interaction leads to better outcomes for kids? Nobody can make that connection."

"Improving communications in an organization may be a good thing to do for its own sake, but in a school it's unlikely to translate into better outcomes for kids."

Total quality management — another tool that's been successfully used in business, also can be ineffective in schools if not done right, Lezotte cautioned.

"Total quality management asks people to measure what they can and do it frequently. It's important to start with a strong conceptual framework that grounds the work they do. Without that, they're trying to make literal translations from the business world into the school setting, doing all these statistical processes and they really don't know why they're measuring what they are," Lezotte cautioned.

> ***"The biggest weakness of the strategic planning process is that it doesn't involve itself in reinventing of a delivery system. And that's what you need to have."***
>
> ***"You have to build your delivery system for change at the same time you're formulating the direction for change," Lezotte explained. "Otherwise, you've got a plan but no engine to get you there. That's part of the reason schools are having such a difficult time with it."***

Strategic Planning

"Strategic planning does some good because it helps to create a focus for the organization," Lezotte commented. "The biggest weakness of the strategic planning process is that it doesn't involve itself in reinventing of a delivery system. And that's what you need to have."

"You have to build your delivery system for change at the same time you're formulating the direction for change," Lezotte explained. "Otherwise, you've got a plan but no engine to get you there. That's part of the reason schools are having such a difficult time with it."

"That's why I think our school effectiveness work has been good, because we work with a school-based planning process. Teachers and administrators are involved actively in a process that connects with a direction for the school, and with the measurements used to monitor progress towards the goals.

"Before any of these reforms are engaged," Lezotte advised, "educators should first ask: 'What is it we want children to know?' Those are the goals. Second, they should ask: 'How will we know when they know it?' That is the outcome evidence. Once we are clear on goals and evidence, we can begin to ask the question: 'Will these tools help us to get from where we are to those?' But until that point, the tools become ends in themselves."

chance to play an important role in helping the school achieve this mission.

Measuring the correlates

Schools measure the presence of these traits by surveying individuals about their perceptions. All the surveys have questions directed at staff members. Some also have versions that measure the perceptions of students, parents, and community members. A later chapter will describe correlate surveys in more detail.

"One of the most valuable exercises resulting from the correlate assessment is the staff discussion which follows," Lezotte and Jacoby said. The school improvement team should lead the school staff, as a unit or in small groups, through an analysis of the results.

"One purpose of the discussions is to make sure the strengths and weaknesses identified in the assessment do not result in incorrect conclusions," the authors explained. Group leaders should verify that the staff had a common understanding of the questions. This process can also reveal whether a perceived problem is a genuine weakness or merely a statement of existing conditions that should be maintained.

For example, one school's analysis of the "safe and orderly" correlate indicated that the staff had little help with discipline problems from the administration. During the discussion, however, it became apparent that teachers preferred to handle their own discipline problems and only wanted help from administrators for severe problems.

> ***One purpose of the discussions is to make sure the strengths and weaknesses identified in the assessment do not result in incorrect conclusions.***

Another value of the survey and discussion is that the process actually teaches the staff about what each correlate means in the day-to-day operation of a school. This increased understanding is extremely useful when it comes time to develop improvement strategies. The heightened perceptions can also help teachers seeking other research on particular correlates.

Following the discussion, it is helpful if the team writes a draft summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the effective schools correlates, which becomes a useful reference when developing the school improvement plan.

DEVELOPING THE PLAN

The first step in developing the plan is to set priorities for improvements. These take the form of improvement objectives, which are built from the data on student achievement.

"The written plan is not an end in itself," the Effective Schools guide warns. "It is a communication tool . . . for staff to use in closing the gap between where the student data indicate the school is and where the mission statement indicates the school wants to be."

The guide further recommends that improvement objectives should:

- Link back to the mission that expresses core values of the school.
- Derive from a careful analysis of current student outcome data.
- Be stated in terms of student learning.
- Be reflected, not in a test score, but in a core body of knowledge to be learned.

For example, the analysis may reveal that students drop out most often in ninth grade with a high failure rate in English. The objective could state that "students will master the essentials of the ninth-grade English curriculum," rather than a specific cutoff score on a standardized test. A climate objective could be to reduce the dropout rate by offering students the opportunity to develop a supportive relationship with a staff member.

Another pitfall to avoid, according to effective schools authority Ron Edmonds, is that "no local plan should depend on changes over which the local school has no control."

Does a problem exist?

In areas of the curriculum where staff have concerns, it is important to look for observable evidence that a problem exists. The most obvious source is standardized tests. In cases where assessments have not been made, such as for expository writing, the staff should look for other evidence, such as letter grades and samples of writing from classrooms.

Check to see if the problem has been present over time, look for school-based causes or sources of the problem, and determine which students are affected by it. These steps can narrow the focus from all ninth-

graders, for example, to ninth-grade boys from low socioeconomic families. The more specifically the problem can be pinpointed, the more effective the strategies can be.

Involving all the staff

Once problems have been identified, it is a good idea to involve the entire staff in determining which problems will be tackled first. Reformers recommend keeping the list to a "manageable number" — such as three to five — to avoid getting bogged down in more projects than can be successfully achieved.

The experts stress that the focus at this stage should not be strictly on the problems. Those successes revealed by the assessment process should be publicized and celebrated. In this way, the staff will develop confidence and a greater willingness to tackle the areas of the instructional program that do need improvement.

Selecting strategies

Once improvement objectives have been developed, team members should examine research and case studies of successful schools to determine the instructional strategies and organizational changes successfully employed by schools that have undertaken similar objectives.

For example, in the English skills objective cited above, the school may want to look at changing the performance expectations of freshman boys and the method of writing instruction.

Sources of information for identifying successful practices include:

- Professional libraries in state education agencies or large school districts.
- Publication searches through ERIC or professional research agencies.
- National professional organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Council of Teachers of Math, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and the American Association of School Administrators.
- Networks of schools engaged in improvement, such as the Coalition of Essential Schools, Outcome-Based Education Consortia, the National Writing Project, and the Paideia Program.

Improvement strategies. The strategies will become part of a three- to five-year school improvement plan that should contain both short-term and long-term strategies. The Effective Schools guide recommends selecting strategies that address these four areas:

- **Curriculum.** Clearly defining the essential elements to be learned.
- **Assessment.** Deciding how to assess whether students have learned the targeted information and whether the assessment matches the curriculum and objectives.
- **Climate factors.** Determining what environmental factors should be in place for the instruction and assessment to be successful.
- **Delivery of instruction.** Determining the best teaching techniques for the curriculum.

Monitoring the results

The plan should specify how the implementation will be monitored. Specifically, the team should determine, in advance, what student work will be accepted as evidence the objectives are being met. The plan should also list who is responsible for collecting the evidence, when it will be collected, and what will be done with the results.

Additional evidence should be specified that can track whether the strategy has been successfully implemented. Obviously a strategy will only be effective to the extent it is implemented. Again, the plan should specify who will collect the information and when and how the information will be used.

Schools that have implemented improvement action plans recommend including the following:

- Objectives to be met
- A list of strategies to be implemented
- Who is responsible for implementing
- When the activity will take place
- When progress will be measured.
- Criteria for determining whether the objective was met.

The samples shown here illustrate two approaches to planning. The Williamston, Michigan, Community Schools document tracks implementation of a school-based objective. The sample from Central Columbia School District in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, illustrates a high school's response to a district-level objective.

Faculty/community endorsement

One of the most important aspects of an effective schools adoption occurs as the plan is being completed. That step is securing the commitment of the staff,

Action Plan Format: Williamston, Michigan

Year _____

Goal _____ Evidence of Need _____

Instructional Objective _____ Evidence of Success _____

Strategies	Person Responsible for Implementing Strategy	Person Responsible for Measuring Progress of the Strategy	Resources Needed	Dates of Activity		Assessment Date (When is progress to be measured?)	Criteria for Objective Attainment & How Measured (How will we know the objective was attained?)
				Start	End		
1)							
2)							
3)							

Adapted from: Williamston Community Schools, Williamston, Michigan

From: A Guide to the School Improvement Process Based on Effective Schools Research

Districtwide Goals and Building-Specific Goals

Priority Goal _____ Date _____

School District _____

Objectives	Major Activities To Be Completed	Completion Dates	Person Responsible (Name and Position)	Estimated Cost
A. Provide an opportunity for teachers to explore methods of instruction that may be incorporated into their curriculum.	A. Provide consultants and/or materials to meet teacher needs and interests in improving their teaching strategies.	Annually	H.S. Principal Department Chairs Staff Development Committee	$ 3,000.00/yr.
B. Provide an opportunity for the staff to interact with teachers in the entire district to increase their awareness of exemplary teaching strategies in our district.	B. District-wide inservice programs.	Annually		
C. Revise evaluation forms to be more specifically related to high school programs and activities.	C. Independent classroom observations.	Annually	H.S. Principal with Professional Staff Committee	

Evaluation Questions To Be Asked	**Evidence To Be Used Answer Evaluation Questions**	**Person Responsible for Evaluation**	**Completion for Evaluation**
A. Has the staff been given an opportunity to provide input for inservice programs?	A. Minutes of staff development committee meetings.	Staff Development Committee	Annually
B. Does the staff apply strategies presented or studied?	B. Classroom observations.	H.S. Principal/Assistant Principal	Annually
C. Have the teachers taken the opportunity to visit other classrooms in the district?	C. Observations by teachers. Department meeting minutes.	Department Chairs	Annually

From: A Guide to the School Improvement Process based on Effective Schools Research *and Central Columbia School District, Bloomsburg, PA*

parents, and community for the steps called for in the plan.

If the staff, parents, and other stakeholders have been surveyed as the plan is being developed, there should be no surprises. Still, because it is crucial that new initiatives be planted in a culture that will nurture them — it is highly recommended that schools engage in a formal campaign to inform key constituencies aoout the specifics of the plan.

First, the recommendations for school improvement should be circulated among members of key groups, including all school staff and parents active in the school, if parents have been part of the planning process. A cover memo should invite the reader to a meeting to give their suggestions.

One district divided the meeting into small groups, with each group chaired by a member of the planning team. "Questions and concerns were handled 'on the spot,' with consensus for acceptance as the target," the Effective Schools guide explained. At the close of the meeting, all the participants met in a large group to endorse formally the school improvement plan.

The public discussion and endorsement is helpful in building ownership, which is critical to the success of the plan. "The public endorsement is also symbolic because it illustrates approval for a change in the culture of the school and signifies a transition from planning to plan implementation," Lezotte and Jacoby explained.

Spreading the word

The next step is to communicate the improvement plan and the changes expected to both internal and external audiences. External audiences are those outside of school, including the news media, service clubs, and others in the community. Internal audiences include all school staff, parents, students, and others in the school district, including central office administrators, principals of feeder or receiving schools, and other individuals or groups who are likely to be affected by the changes.

The communications process is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

Because it is crucial that new initiatives be planted in a culture that will nurture them — it is highly recommended that schools engage in a formal campaign to inform key constituencies about the specifics of the plan.

CREATING A CLIMATE FOR CHANGE

Once the plan has been formally accepted and the information communicated to key groups, the real work begins. Successful implementation requires that teachers and administrators — those who will be responsible for making the improvement program work — understand and support the changes being planned. Creating a receptive climate for the new program requires an understanding of the change process.

Real, meaningful change requires time and flexibility. Time is required for teachers and others affected by the change to understand and accept the need to do things differently and the implications that their behavior and work patterns must be altered. Implementation also requires adequate time for training of staff in new techniques and for planning time that enables the staff to work through the inevitable problems and issues that arise.

Time also is required for participants to adopt new cultural norms that are inherent in the improvement process. Since culture evolves slowly as a system of shared values, any changes in those shared values must be given time to develop. Such changes occur because members of the school:

- See that change is needed.
- Agree on the methods and strategies planned for improvement.
- Work together to implement strategies in ways that allow adaptation to accommodate individual strengths.
- Provide a way to evaluate whether the new system is working.

The change process is described further in a later chapter.

Implementation/evaluation

There are three essential prerequisites for successful implementation of a school improvement program, according to Lezotte:

- Common language
- Time to meet and discuss implementation

- Place to meet and discuss implementation.

Any school improvement program has its own glossary of terms and concepts that have a special meaning in its context. So that teachers and administrators develop a shared understanding and commitment to the program, all parties must be familiar with those terms and agree with the way they are used.

"Teaching the common language cannot be done once and forgotten," Lezotte and Jacoby advised. "To maintain the focus, the common language must be renewed and revisited on a regular basis."

"At every opportunity, the principal and members of the school improvement team should 'talk' the plan," added Gary Mathews of the Spring Branch School District in Houston, Texas.

Emphasizing the importance of symbolism when changing cultural norms, Mathews advised abandoning activities and events not included in the plan and launching new activities and events that are part of the plan with "great fanfare and celebration."

Time and place

Since school improvement occurs over a long period of time, it is essential that the school improvement team continue to meet after the plan is completed to keep abreast of progress and to address problems promptly so the improvement stays on course.

For the same reasons, committees formed to address certain aspects of the plan should meet regularly. To keep a focus on the new mission, meetings of parents, community, and students with the improvement team should also be scheduled.

Finding time to meet is a challenge for most districts for two reasons, Lezotte cautioned.

First, time is money. When meetings are held during the school day or summer, money for substitutes or additional work days are usually needed.

Second, some members of the community may believe that teachers are only working when they are with students — that time spent at school away from students is not important.

Part of educating the community on school improvement, then, is explaining the need to provide staff members with time to discuss progress on the improvement plan, develop new instructional materials, and provide training for teachers and administrators.

"Local boards of education and the superintendent must convince the community that this time to meet and to talk about school improvement is absolutely critical," Lezotte said. "Creating more time for planning, curriculum review, and staff development" are essential for success.

Institutionalizing improvement

One of the cultural norms associated with effective schools is a belief that instruction can always be improved. When teachers and administrators accept this idea, they are open to examining the effectiveness of current practices and trying new ways of doing things. For such an attitude to become "a way of life" — or an integral part of the culture — it is important to structure the improvement effort to be self-renewing.

Steps for making improvement part of the school's standard operating procedure include:

- Conducting an annual evaluation of improvement plans.
- Scheduling regular planning cycles.
- Developing training modules so new staff can quickly become part of the school's culture.
- Working with parents, the state department of education, and other organizations to stay current on research developments and successful practices from other school districts.

Such strategies help maintain a culture that continually strives to improve, rather than becoming settled in its ways.

OUTCOME-BASED EDUCATION

Another systemwide reform that is having a positive effect on student achievement, climate, and culture is outcome-based education. This approach begins with the end result — what the district wants students to be able to do — and works backward to determine what changes are needed to achieve those results for students.

One of the cultural norms associated with effective schools is a belief that instruction can always be improved. When teachers accept this idea, they are open to new ways of doing things.

The Johnson City, New York, Public Schools devel-

oped its concept of outcome-based education over two decades. In 1971, the district, dissatisfied with student achievement scores, launched a comprehensive redesign of its entire program.

The Outcomes-Driven Developmental Model (ODDM) employs a systems approach to examine all aspects of schooling, including instructional practices, curriculum design, school climate, and school management. School board decisions are based on what best supports student learning according to current research practices on schooling. The master plan calls for those specifications to be updated as needed.

By 1984, the district had achieved substantial gains in student achievement for eighth graders, one of the key "outcomes" the district had targeted.

As a result, Johnson City's Outcomes-Driven Development Model for Comprehensive School Improvement became the first systemwide program for grades K-8 to be approved by the U.S. Department of Education for dissemination through the National Diffusion Network.

Key elements

Major components of the Johnson City model are:

- A belief system predicated on the conviction that all children can learn (philosophical base).
- Specific outcomes for students.

Outcomes-Driven Developmental Model Mission:

All students will learn well

RESEARCH BASE

Psychological Base — **Transformational Leader** — **Philosophical Base**

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	COMMUNITY SUPPORT	TEACHER SUPPORT
Staff development Communications network Problem solving Change process Climate improvement Management	Board —Policy —Support Publics Networking	Instructional processes Curriculum organization School practices Classroom practices Organizational structures

Desired Student Exit Behaviors

1. Self-esteem as a learner and person.
2. Academics—thinking and understanding.
3. Self-directed as a learner and person.
4. Concern for others.
5. Process skills–problem solving, communication, decision making, accountability, group process.

- A research-based, strong instructional approach that is flexible and sound.
- Extensive use of teacher teaming.
- A behavioral approach for which all members of the organization accept responsibility (the psychological base).
- Problem solving.
- Consensus building for decisions.

Basic philosophy

The philosophical base is a set of beliefs that are determined by the entire school staff based on research. Enlisting the ideas of all staff to arrive at a set of beliefs also is good for improving school climate. Johnson City Superintendent Albert Mamary lists the following beliefs that many outcome-based schools subscribe to:

- Talent can be developed, and teachers take responsibility for developing the individual talents of each student.
- All students should succeed.
- Excellence is the goal for all students.
- Collaboration by all — teachers, parents, administrators, students — gets the best results.

Transformational leaders are those "who create a compelling vision of what can be and who can empower others to realize the vision," Frank Alessi, ODDM project director in Johnson City, said in an interview for this report. In reaching that vision, it is important to build consensus among staff members. "This is not a majority vote," Alessi cautioned, but instead, "a critical mass" of support because decisions have been made in a process open to all.

True collaboration

"In our district, there's a spirit of understanding about decision making. It's not 100 percent true, but, by and large, everyone knows that anybody can influence almost any decision," Alessi said.

Decision making is based on four questions known a the Success Connection:

1. What do we want?
2. What do we know about what we want?
3. What do we believe about what we know and want?
4. What will we do?

"When the answers to these four questions are clear and aligned, anyone can influence those decisions," Alessi said.

As Alessi recalls it, "When Johnson City was implementing ODDM, teachers asked, 'you mean we can influence the bus schedule?' Then-Superintendent Jack Champlin, the father of ODDM, would reply: 'Does the bus schedule serve learning or does learning serve the bus schedule?'"

The implication is that there are no sacred cows — that the central administration may need to make accommodations to the building level when it is pointed out that the time the buses run interferes with an educational goal at the school.

"Each person has a brain and may have something to contribute to any decision," Alessi continued. "For this reason, everybody — from the superintendent to the director of transportation — has to live within the success connections."

Psychological base

The psychological basis for ODDM in Johnson City is control theory, which sees all human motivation as personal and chosen.

"Control theory is about how we control ourselves, and not about controlling others," Mamary explained in an article in the publication, *Quality Outcomes-Driven Education.* The theory states that people perform at their best when their basic psychological and physical needs are met. These conditions also contribute to a positive climate. The four psychological needs are:

> ***Control theory is about how we control ourselves, and not about controlling others.***

- **Power** — The need to feel in control of one's life, to feel worthwhile, to have a sense of accomplishment, to maintain dignity, and to feel one is making a difference.
- **Connecting** — The need to belong and relate to others.
- **Choice** — The need to have freedom and choice in life, to be able to risk and question without fear of humiliation.
- **Contentment** — The need to have fun and happiness in life.

The **physical need** is for basic elements necessary for human survival, including air, food, water, and shelter.

Success Connection

Based on Johnson City Model

Control theory, change and climate

"Control theory states that human beings are purposeful creatures," Alessi explained. "They will act according to their purposes." The problem with many school reform efforts is that districts try to "cajole teachers, reward, or threaten them," which is treating teachers like "stimulus response organisms rather than control theory organisms."

The more effective approach, according to Alessi, is to work with staff to reach agreement on what they want to accomplish, what their knowledge base is and their belief systems — in other words, the series of questions Johnson City refers to as the Success Connection.

Don't tell . . . ask. "Control theory teaches us: don't tell people; don't push on them. Ask questions so they have to confront themselves," Alessi advised. "If you push on them, *you* become the issue. You don't put them in conflict with you. If anything, you put them in conflict with what they say they want."

"In Johnson City, that's one of the keys to the success we've had. That we treat people like control theory organisms instead of stimulus response organisms."

"Our approach to climate is one in which people can meet their needs effectively and responsibly and still

Stimulus Response vs. Control Theory

In many districts, high schools are the most resistant to change because they are larger and more compartmentalized, and teachers are subject matter specialists rather than generalists. Alessi painted this scenario to show the contrast between the two psychological approaches to human behavior:

School A introduces a reform idea using a stimulus-response approach. The mind-set of the administrator or planning team is, "How can we get the staff to do what we want?"

First, they might try to "win over" the staff, Alessi said, and "show them how good it [the reform] is. But the staff may not see it that way. Next comes a reward for getting involved, such as pay for working on the program during the summer. The third step is to punish the reluctant by making life more difficult for them."

In school B, where control theory is operating, the principal or change agent asks, "How would you like the high school to be? Would you like two-thirds of your students achieving at high levels instead of one-third?"

The following dialogue illustrates this:

Teacher: "Are you going to tell us how to do it?"

Principal: "No, but if we can agree about what we want (the success connection), why don't we take a look at how we can get what we want. . . what the knowledge is out there. I've got a few articles I've run off. Would you be willing to take a look at them? Maybe you have some things that we could look at. Then we can start to agree on what we want."

Teacher: "I've tried some of that research bull. I don't want to look at it."

Principal: "Let's suppose you were planning to go to a doctor who hadn't done any research into stomach disorders for 30 years and you had a stomach disorder. Another doctor kept up with the research. Which one would you go to?"

> ***Let's suppose you were planning to go to a doctor who hadn't done any research into stomach disorders for 30 years and you had a stomach disorder. Another doctor kept up with the research. Which one would you go to?***

Case Study in OBE: Pasco Public Schools

The Pasco, Washington, Public Schools came to use outcome-based education in an evolutionary process to improve school climate, among other things. First, the district embarked on an ambitious program of school improvement using school-based planning teams and criteria from effective schools research.

"We changed the culture from a top-down norm to one of site-based management, which generated lots of enthusiasm among staff, said Larry Nyland, former superintendent in Pasco.

Achievement scores rose rapidly and teachers and community members were excited by the results. "Our success was due to a great extent to working on the right things and partly to the enthusiasm generated by a feeling of ownership among the participants," he explained.

Gains were difficult to sustain, however, due to staff turnover and lack of training for new teachers. Some veteran teachers felt overloaded by activities added on as part of the effort.

As the district researched successful programs, they learned about outcome-based education and its pioneer, the Johnson City, New York, Schools, which had been fine tuning this approach for 20 years.

Accepting responsibility

Improving school climate and culture means having the courage to be responsible for others.

"Johnson City's process is based on the premise that all children can learn and that, in order to make this happen, you must put in place organizational change that dedicates itself to this premise," said Stephanie Tesch, the assistant superintendent in Pasco who was responsible for implementing OBE.

"Inherent in Johnson City's model is a psychological base for development that teaches us how to accept responsibility as individuals, as groups, and as a school district. Typically, public schools *offer* a sound education; they *do not take responsibility* for children's learning," she continued.

Typically, public schools offer a sound education; they do not take responsibility for children's learning.

While schools often make decisions based on "efficiency, economics, and the political climate of the community, outcomes-driven education requires that decisions take into account what achieves best student learning," she cautioned. "These decisions are not necessarily what is the most efficient, what best matches the political climate, or what is the cheapest solution."

(continued on page 60)

serve very well the needs of the organization, Alessi said.

"If you don't provide chalk for teachers, you're not meeting their needs and they're not going to be able to meet the needs of the organization. 'I've seen many schools where teachers have to beg for the tools to do their job," he commented.

Another climate consideration is how people are treated when they take a risk. Elementary teachers in Johnson City had great ownership in ODDM from the early days. When something did not go well, the response from administrators was not, "This is a failure," but, "What can we learn from it?" Alessi explained.

When schools consider joining the Essential Schools network, an important part of the exploration is forming a steering committee to discuss how they see their school in the future. Pueblo County, Colorado, High School spent two years exploring the essential schools approach and discussing ideas and approaches.

At first, only 35 percent of the teachers felt any change was needed , and discussions continued. A year later, a committee of students was formed to put the nine common principles into their own words. After that, 85 percent of the teachers endorsed the document. The

Case Study in OBE: Pasco Public Schools cont'd

Implementing OBE

In the spring of 1987, the Pasco school board made a two-year commitment to outcome-based education. Core teams from each school building, consisting of teachers, administrators, and some classified staff, attended eight days of training during the 1987-88 school year. Training focused on three key principles of OBE, which have become core beliefs in the culture at Pasco:

- All students can learn and succeed.
- Success causes further success.
- Schools control the conditions of success.

Pasco's instructional program is based on mastery learning, a system to ensure that each child succeeds by holding achievement constant and varying the time required for learning. Staff development has included instruction not only in mastery learning techniques, but also cooperative learning and Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA).

TESA is a training program that makes teachers aware of how their own biases towards individuals and groups can affect student success in the classroom. This approach, based on raising teacher awareness of their own behavior, complements the principle of responsibility as well. Cooperative learning and TESA are explained in more detail in the next chapter.

Structuring classroom lessons for cooperation instead of competition complements the core belief that all students can learn and that students are responsible for helping themselves and their peers to succeed. It contrasts with many traditional classrooms where there is a tendency to sort students into high, middle, and low-achieving groups.

Reality therapy

Reality therapy is a process based on the work of psychiatrist William Glasser that encourages all individuals to accept responsibility for their own behavior.

For Pasco students, reality therapy includes a three-step counseling process for disciplinary infractions involving logical consequences rather than punishment.

For teachers, it means taking responsibility for meeting joint objectives for groups of students shared by teacher teams. At each school, teachers work in teams of two to four to plan for instruction and to discuss and evaluate student behavior and student learning.

During the first year of implementation, "the staff development program was devoted equally to process and product," said former Superintendent Nyland. The process concentrated on building support for a culture based on the new core beliefs. The product was training on how to implement the instructional process and mastery learning.

THE PASCO MISSION

These core beliefs — that all children can learn and that schools control the conditions of success — became part of the district's mission statement, adopted in early 1988, which also identified five specific outcomes. It states that Pasco students will:

- Develop and demonstrate *high* self-esteem.
- Learn using cognitive skills that range from simple to complex.
- Use process skills to solve problems, communicate, make decisions, and interact in groups.
- Show concern for others.
- Show self-direction in learning

Reality Therapy

Involvement is building a trusting relationship and affirming strengths.

STEPS:

1. Involvement
2. What are you doing? What do you want?
3. What are the consequences?
   - positive and negative
   - immediate and long-term
   - impact on others
4. Make a value judgment
5. Make a plan
6. Get a commitment
7. Follow up

GUIDELINES:

1. Don't ask why
2. Stay in the present
3. Never punish
4. No excuses
5. Don't dwell on feelings
6. Establish the client as the chief causal agent
7. Encourage the client to be his/her own advisor
8. Don't take responsibility for the client's behavior
9. Ask the key question –
   "If you continue doing this, where will it lead you?"
10. Go for a both-win solution
11. Never give up

Pasco School District No. 1, 1990

Three-year phase-in

The first year, each school sent a Building Core Team of teachers and administrators to four training sessions. Each team had some district funds to implement training or specific projects with the total staff at their home school.

Representatives from each school served on a District Core Team to coordinate the overall direction of OBE. One of their tasks was to develop the mission statement, which was approved by the school board the following February.

Each summer of the three-year phase-in, five days of intensive training was provided to groups of teachers and administrators. In 1988, the week-long training was given to all teachers from three pilot schools and teams from the remaining schools.

In August, 1988, Nyland spoke to 200 teachers at a back-to-school session on the core beliefs, noting that all staff had an opportunity to shape the beliefs during the previous school year.

"Some were nodding their heads but others gave me blank looks," Nyland commented. "The training had been long since done. It had not necessarily had an impact on what teachers do in the classroom. That said to me we needed to do it all over again."

Seeing is believing

"Schools haven't been in the business of asking people their opinions," Nyland explained. "At first they didn't take it seriously. Teachers were saying — with their body language — 'we didn't think this was important. Actions speak louder than words.' The staff had to see (shared decision-making) in process before it was believed."

The second year, principals from the pilot schools met weekly to share results. Additional training was provided to teams from each school on the instructional process and training began on Reality Therapy and communication issues. Each summer, the five-day training was repeated for staffs of the schools that were converting to OBE.

After three years, an evaluation was done by Brigham Young University to determine the extent to which outcome-based education had been implemented in the schools and what evidence existed of student growth in the exit behaviors.

After the three years, "the district had good support in the area we had invested most heavily in — vision, belief, and the instructional process," Nyland said.

The bottom line

"Our focus is on our exit behaviors — self-esteem, learning to learn, basic thinking skills, process skills, and concern for others," said Tesch. "Johnson City's process showed that development of these five exit behaviors gets you better student learning over a period of years. This is not 'play the game to improve test scores' using gimmicks such as different groupings and teaching to the test. Instead, this is looking at the whole student, teaching ourselves and our children the whole range of capacities needed to be a 21st Century person."

"In Pasco," Tesch continued, "we want vigorous thinkers, not compliant responders. We want learning to feel good and set a life-long pattern. Legislating competencies and standardized tests will not get you these results. A process that develops commitment to students' success in public education will get that result."

Another aspect of OBE is the notion that improvement continues over time. "At Pasco, we are building into the culture the expectation that all of us will continue to learn how to do our jobs better," Nyland concluded.

OBE and climate

Proponents of outcome-based education acknowledge the importance of a positive climate and a culture that reinforces basic values in order for student performance to improve.

Johnson City Superintendent Mamary believes that school climate should be continually assessed and that schools make provisions for continuous improvement. In the publication, *Quality Outcomes-Driven Education,* Mamary describes a positive climate as having the following elements:

- Students and staff are productive and content.
- Adequate materials are provided.
- Buildings are clean and inviting.
- All students are learning well.
- All students feel valued and are involved in the governance of the school.
- Agreed-upon procedures for problem solving and decision making are used.
- Communication skills of active listening are the norm of the school.
- Basic needs are satisfied for all those involved with the schools.
- A reasonable salary is provided.

Builders and blockers

The Pasco School District developed ten positive statements and their negative corollaries to help define how their basic belief system translates into day-to-day practice. The statements are labeled (1) Beliefs that Enable and (2) Beliefs that Block.

For example, the core belief, "All children can learn" corresponds to the belief that blocks: "Only some children can learn." Most of the ten statements relate to climate issues, such as trust, positive expectations, and cooperation between home and school.

Pasco Developmental Process for Outcome-Driven Education: The Belief System Defined

The following ten statements help define the basic three components of the Pasco School District belief system:

Beliefs that Enable	Beliefs that Block	Beliefs that Enable	Beliefs that Block
1. **All students can learn** Definition: Given time and appropriate instruction, all students can master critical learnings and achieve the exit behaviors.	1. **Some students can learn** Definition: Students who learn more slowly are not as bright, and some students never master the critical learnings or achieve the exit behaviors.	6. **Learning as collaborators** Definition: Climate encourages students to work together for academic and social achievement. • An attitude of "in working together we all succeed" • Heterogeneous grouping as appropriate • Problem solving and decision making	6. **Learning as rivals** Definition: School climate fosters winners and losers, students working against each other. • I succeed, you fail. • Success and leadership for a few. • Grading reflects bell curve
2. **Excellence for all** Definition: All students are given the time and support for mastery. • Grades reflect learning/mastery • All students experience enrichments/extensions • High expectations for all	2. **Excellence for a few** Definition: Some students are given the opportunity for mastery • Moving on before mastery • Limiting time to learn • Low expectations for some	7. **Inclusive practices** Definition: Students have access to all programs • Groups are temporary, flexible • Fewer pull-outs • Everyone can be eligible to participate	7. **Restrictive practices** Definition: Students are denied access to programs • Grouping is permanent • Tracking that limits choice and opportunity • Selective participation based on money, ability, gender, race
3. **Trust** Definition: The district, building, and classroom environments encourage communication, promote growth, and enhance self-esteem for students, staff, and community. • Respect for one another's knowledge and expertise • Leadership nurtured and developed • Mutual caring and support • Risk taking and change acceptable	3. **Fear and suspicion** Definition: The environment inhibits communication, limits growth, and reduces self-worth and openness for students, staff, and community • People afraid of one another • High stress • Limited face-to-face dialogue • No room for mistakes • Little tolerance for risk taking	8. **Mastery learning** Definition: Unit/course objectives are clearly stated and students will know how these will be measured. • Students and teachers work together to meet objectives • Tests matched to objectives and instruction • Students needing more time receive it without penalty	8. **Mystery learning** • Definition: Unit/course objectives and measurements are unclear. • Tests contain surprises and don't measure critical learnings • Failure rate is high • Grading reflects criteria not related to student learning
4. **Positive talk** Definition: We exhibit verbally and nonverbally a positive sense of caring for every individual. • Affirming statements/notes • Direct communication • Polite acceptance of disagreement • Support for one another	4. **Negative talk** Definition: We disregard a person's self-worth. • Put-downs • Racial/ethnic slurs • Negative body language • Rumor/indirect communication • Sarcasm • Allowing humor to be used at one's expense	9. **Continuous prevention** Definition: A proactive process leads to early intervention of identified needs. • Early identification of learning needs for intervention • Assessing/teaching prerequisites • Flexible grouping and programs • Correctives within 24 hours	9. **Delayed remediation** Definition: A reactive process only intervenes when students have repeatedly failed. • Labeling students • Little reteaching and/or correctives given • Students seldom exit their groups
5. **Empowering** Definition: Schools empower personal and academic growth. • Active participation in learning process • Expectations clear and understood • Organizational skills learned and used • Awareness of consequences • Accountable for actions • Increased participation in decision making	5. **Controlling, rescuing, and debilitating** Definition: Schools foster depending behavior. • Teachers make all decisions • Limited student participation in planning • Low expectations • Excuses mass made for poor performance	10. **Home/school cooperation and support** Definition: Parents and schools team for the success of the students • Parents/community feel welcome • Parents involved in school functions • Multilingual school communications (notes, letters, translators)	10. **Schools isolated from community** Definition: Schools fail to work with parents and community. • Parents/community feel unwelcome • Parents not involved • School messages on one language only

goal, according to Principal Dick Amman, is to make major changes, but only those for which the whole school can solidly support.

This opportunity for discussion, reformers say, is important to building consensus for change. In the typical school, most teachers have little systematic contact with their peers. They see students only in the classroom and they do not usually discuss individual students with their colleagues, according to the book, *Teachers at Work*, by Susan Moore Johnson.

To change the culture, teachers must have opportunities to share meaningful information.

Does OBE work?

Does outcome-based education work? Johnson City, with the longest experience of any school district with this approach, set some very specific goals to measure its effectiveness. One was that, after implementation, at least 75 percent of all eighth-graders would score at least six months above grade level on reading and math on the California Achievement Test. The district met its goal in reading by 1984 and exceeded the goal in math.

The test publisher indicated that normally about 42 percent of students would be expected to score six months or more above grade level in reading and 41 percent in mathematics. Johnson City reported that these gains in student achievement have persisted since the mid-1980s.

These gains in achievement led to an improvement in climate, but the gains also were a byproduct of a climate in which teachers supported each other and a culture that strove for excellence.

FOCUSING ON THE ESSENTIALS

The Coalition of Essential Schools is a reform born out of a five-year research effort that found many high schools were "shopping malls" of education — large and comprehensive, offering a wide variety of courses where students were allowed "freedom to do their own thing." Motivated students could find challenge in their courses, but average students were allowed to drift along, doing the bare minimum.

A "shopping mall" curriculum can contribute to a negative climate because students who are not being challenged tend to disengage from education. Students also may resent having to memorize lots of facts that they will soon forget, rather than focusing on deeper educational concepts.

Part of the problem, according to coalition founder Theodore Sizer, is that schools are trying to do too much, offering an array of courses to correct all social ills.

The courses are compartmentalized into 50-minute periods, which works against studying a topic in depth. In the rush to cover large amounts of material, subjects often are trivialized. History, for example, becomes a series of dates and battles to be memorized, rather than big ideas to be debated.

In addition, the current system requires each teacher to teach 150 to 200 students, too many for them to know personally.

"In my second year of teaching, I had 204 students," Sizer said in an interview. "I didn't know them as kids. I simply knew them as history or English students. And I served them very poorly."

The answer: redesign schools

The antidote, according to reformers, is to redesign high schools so each teacher has no more than 80 students and the class day is reorganized to cover a smaller number of "essential skills" and areas of knowledge in more depth.

Wisely, the reformers did not package their recommendations as a model that schools would try to implement without modification. Instead, the coalition distilled the findings and recommendations into nine common principles around which each school would craft its own solutions.

The concept is that the teachers and administrators of each school would adopt these nine beliefs and then shape the curriculum, class schedule, and overall operation of the school to fit their community.

Schools that join the consortium do so only after a core group of teachers agree to participate — indicating a climate that is open to change. Adopting the essential principles affects the culture of the school in a long-term process that forces teachers to examine their basic assumptions about students and learning.

Interested schools begin with an exploratory phase, where teachers meet and discuss the essential principles, visit other schools in the coalition, and decide whether to proceed with this approach. Since 1984, more than 130 public and private schools have signed on with the coalition.

Nine essential principles

The essential principles are:

- **Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach** — Students should be active learners, not passive recipients of knowledge.

- **Simple goals: "less is more"** — Students should master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge, developing thinking skills by studying topics in depth rather than covering much content superficially.
- **Intellectual rigor** — The purpose of schooling is to help students learn to use their minds well; this is more important than offering a "comprehensive" curriculum.
- **Staff as generalists** — Principals and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first and subject specialists second.
- **Universal goals** — School goals should apply to all students, although the way students reach these goals will vary.
- **Tone** — School climate should communicate high expectations without stress; with trust, fairness, generosity, and tolerance;
- **Personalize education** — The school should be organized so that secondary teachers have no more than 80 students, in order to know them as individuals and tailor instruction to their needs.
- **Budget for a 1:80 staff-student ratio** and ample time for collective staff planning and competitive salaries. By eliminating some existing services, the coalition says such restructuring can be accomplished for no more than 10 percent above the cost of traditional schools.
- **Diploma by exhibition** — Students should demonstrate mastery of skills and knowledge through products, such as portfolios and demonstrations, rather than focusing on grades and class credits.

Achieving the ratio

Some schools achieve the 1:80 ratio by teaching more than one subject. Instead of six or seven classes of English, all with different students, the instructor may teach sections of English and other sections of history, having students in more than one class.

Others divide the campus into schools-within-schools, breaking a large anonymous school into smaller, more manageable units. Key elements are to structure the school so that teachers have few enough students to know them as individuals and to give teachers time to talk about the students with the other teachers.

"Schedules are written so that teachers who have the same students have the same lunch period," Sizer explained. "They eat together four times a week. It's not a scheduled planning time, it's the opportunity. For example, two teachers may have the same middle or high school student who is "coming alive in art but falling apart in math." The teachers could set up an art project that requires math, showing the student how math concepts such as ratio and proportion are important in art," he added.

Climate implications

How do the students feel about this more personal approach? "We're comfortable around the teachers," said Nathan Scovens, a senior at Walbrook, an inner-city Baltimore high school. "Once I leave here there will always be a relationship between them and myself. We can always go to them."

"I was horrible at the beginning of last year," said Billie Lawrence, a student at suburban Parkway South High School near St. Louis, referring to her first year in the essential schools program.

"I would just sit back and laugh and say to my friends how I didn't care about school. Inside I knew, though, that my teacher was really teaching me. By the end of the year, when it was time to do my projects and bring my parents in and pull it all together, I really cared about it. Truthfully, that's what brought me back to school this year—I wanted them to see me change."

"In some coalition schools," Sizer commented, "the truancy and drop out rates have almost disappeared even though the kids gripe and gripe about how much harder they have to work than everybody else. How do you connect those two things? The only way I connect them is that those kids know the teachers know them and care for them. It has a profound effect. It's true for adults, too. We don't go back to the store where we're treated facelessly."

BREAKING THE ICE

"The last time many teachers routinely talked about issues of education was probably in graduate school," said Beverly Simpson, a Coalition staff member who works with schools at the start of their involvement.

As a result, some teachers are eager to end the isolation and build a new norm of collegiality by starting an essential school on their own, as a school within a school.

Watch for cliques. After eight years of experience with the process, Coalition consultants warn that this approach is likely to backfire. "If you don't include people in the conversation, they feel excluded, and excluded people make things fail," said the Coalition's Director for Schools, Bob McCarthy.

In 1984, a group of teachers at Houston's Westbury High School started meeting as "Horace's Company," inspired by Sizer's book on school reform, *Horace's Compromise.* The group discussed the nine principles and ways they could try them out. The group became a charter member of the coalition as a school-within-a-school.

For a variety of reasons, including a series of principal changes, the entire faculty never was actively involved in discussing essential schools ideas and practices. Eventually, the 90-plus faculty narrowly voted down whole-school involvement. As a result, Westbury temporarily shut the program down, going back to the planning stages.

Starting the conversation

This time, a deliberate effort was made to build dialogue into every teacher's day.

The effort paid off. "Many of the most resistent faculty, such as shop or art teachers who saw their subjects threatened by change, are now contributing key

Conversation Starters: Some Key Questions

The Coalition of Essential Schools has used this technique in beginning the conversation at schools in the exploratory stages. In groups of around five people, consider a few of the following questions. (Warning: For each set allow two to three hours; to "cover" all of them will only lead to superficial conversations.) For each one, come up with three answers to share with the larger group, and then together "cook down" the list to no more than five items the whole group can stand behind.

I.

- What do we want students to know and be able to do when they leave our school? What would our school be proud to list on our diploma?
- What are people like whom we really admire? What do they do? If schools were trying to help shape these characteristics, skills, and habits, what kinds of practices and structures would they have to set up?

II.

- What is the most powerful learning experience you have ever had? Tell the stories, then talk about the characteristics and conditions that made learning possible.
- Where in our school are powerful learning experiences already going on? What are the teaching strategies or other strategies that are allowing it to happen? How could we make these conditions possible throughout the whole school? What might keep it from happening?

III.

- Which of the Nine Common Principles would be easiest to adapt in our school? Which would be the most difficult? Why?
- What would be uncomfortable for you personally about starting to work with the Nine Common Principles? What would be comfortable? (Don't need to ask why.)
- If you were going to visit a school where that difficult principle was in practice, what would you see kids doing? What would teachers and adults in the building be doing?
- If you were going to put that principle into practice in your school, what would you need to make it happen? From whom do you need these things? Make a list for yourself personally, and one for the staff as a whole.

From: Horace, *Newsletter of the Coalition of Essential Schools*

Meeting Urban Challenges Through Improvement Teams

Portsmouth, Virginia, is an industrialized city of 100,000 with its share of urban problems. The city ranks fifth in the state in serious crime and eighth in adolescent pregnancies. One-fifth of its population is on welfare.

The Portsmouth Public Schools is a district committed to academic excellence through school improvement teams, according to Superintendent Richard Trumble, "because serious educational reform occurs through the diligent efforts of people who know how to do it best."

The school improvement teams contain teachers, parents, support staff, and principals. Each school receives achievement data reported by gender, race and socioeconomic status to pinpoint where and for which students school programs are effective and ineffective.

Mapp Junior High, a 600-pupil sixth- and seventh-grade school, was honored as Portsmouth's most improved school for 1990-91. The disrict was commended for its efforts to improve test scores, attendance, suspension rates, school climate, and participation in the Parent-Teacher Association.

Collaboration pays off

According to Principal Lindell Wallace, the school's success in these areas was due to collaborative efforts at the school level, including:

- Teacher involvement in planning and decision making.
- Establishing ownership and support among all staff members.
- Listening to teachers.
- Sharing in problems and concerns of the teachers.
- Parent involvement in school activities.

"If the teachers have a problem, I have a problem," Wallace said, explaining his philosophy on managing the school.

Teachers and counselors are encouraged to try new programs to attack problems of low test scores, attendance, and self-esteem. As a result, school-site planning has led to innovative programs that help at-risk students succeed and encourage other students to excel.

For example, the Mapp Mentor program pairs at-risk students with adult mentors for counseling, tutoring, and developing socialization skills. Begun by seventh-grade English teacher Barbara Rohr, the mentor program works to keep students in school by providing academic assistance and a positive role model who can help the students make proper career choices.

"Flunkbusters"

"Flunkbusters" employs peer tutoring and catchy rap songs as a way to help at-risk students succeed. Students attend a kickoff rally hosted by local radio personalities. Through a dance and rap song, students learn how they can become a Flunkbuster by signing up for after-school peer tutoring.

Members of the Mapp Junior High Future Educators of America and the National Junior Honor Society tutor Flunkbuster members two afternoons a week. Students who improve failing grades receive a Flunkbuster certificate and gifts from a radio station. According to seventh-grade English teacher Linda Goss, sponsor of the program, 200 students received Flunkbuster certificates in the first two years of the program.

To challenge all students, Mapp sponsors the HIGH program, which stands for Hope, Integrity, Goals and Honor. Sixth-grade teacher Alice Williams founded the program to reward students for academic excellence, proper behavior, and good attendance while building positive school-community relations.

Food for thought

Students who qualify for the honor roll and satisfy attendance and citizenship requirements are treated to a banquet with their family and teachers at the end of the year. During the banquet, students receive special gifts donated by local merchants. Since the program began, more than 100 sixth- and seventh-grade students have been honored, and 50 community businesses have donated services.

The school improved test scores by increasing emphasis on reading and writing and enhancing student test-taking skills. Teachers encouraged more silent reading for enjoyment and had classroom discussions of their books. Students wrote stories and poems related to their reading and took computer classes that included reading and writing exercises. Teachers also helped students feel more comfortable with standardized tests, helping them to recognize and understand different test formats.

From 1988-89 to 1990-91, seventh-grade average scores on Iowa Tests of Basic Skills rose from the 32nd to the 38th percentile in vocabulary and from the 41st to the 48th in language.

Cleanliness and safety

School climate factors that have contributed to Mapp's success as the most improved school were an emphasis on cleanliness and safety. Teachers are assigned to monitor different areas of the school so students are not afraid of harm or intimidation. "Students feel good about being here," said Principal Wallace.

guidance in the effort to introduce exhibitions for graduation," said Karen Owen, Westbury's Essential Schools coordinator.

In planning these conversations, teachers should not try to impose a given reform, such as the nine principles, because that, too, will backfire. "The conversation has to have a democratic focus," Sizer said. "Each school must find its own ways to work through its particular challenges. But conversation is the necessary medium to do this," he continued. "The school's first task should be setting up a context of collegiality in which the school can thrive."

Common threads

As these examples show, there are a number of organizational reforms that are having a positive influence on climate and culture. Common threads in the successful programs are:

- Focusing on the individual school as the locus of change.
- Including all those who will be affected by the changes.

Many of the most resistent faculty, such as shop or art teachers who saw their subjects threatened by change, are now contributing key guidance in the effort to introduce exhibitions for graduation.

- Starting with large goals, rather than specific instructional techniques.
- Allowing plenty of time to gather information, develop plans and implement them.
- Including monitoring and evaluation in the plan.
- Emphasizing changes that will improve educational outcomes for students.

The success of any school reform, however, ultimately depends on what happens in each individual classroom. The next chapter explores instructional strategies and techniques that improve climate by motivating students. The strategies also help to shape an achievement-oriented culture through nurturing higher expectations for students.

CHAPTER 5

Shaping CLIMATE THROUGH INSTRUCTION

No factor has a greater influence on student attitudes — and their part of the climate equation — than the type and tenor of instruction that takes place in the classroom. If instruction is interesting and stimulating, if the students feel capable of doing the work and the teacher expects them to succeed, then the climate will be positive. Conversely, if class work is boring and repetitive, if students feel they will never be called on or expected to excel, then efforts to improve climate outside the classroom will have little effect on the overall climate of the school.

The fourth-grade students in Gwen Ryan's class sit at their desks, which are arranged in groups of four. Each student pulls out a different paperback novel selected from the classroom library that he or she has been reading.

"Turn to the first page and read the very first paragraph over again," Ryan says. After a few minutes, she continues, "Now share in your small group what you thought about that first paragraph. Did it make you want to read more? Feel free to read some sentences aloud in your groups."

Ryan circulates among the desks, listening in on the discussions and making suggestions. Later, the class has a large group discussion about starting stories. Then they begin to write their own stories.

Down the hall, fourth-grade teacher David Hempstead stands at the blackboard, where he has written "topic sentence" in an outline that includes the words "description" and "detail."

"Today we are going to be writing stories," Hempstead says. 'A good story draws the reader in right away with interesting details or action. Its paragraphs will have topic sentences that carry the story along," he continues.

He shares examples of good writing on an overhead projector, then encourages students to write their own stories using the model outlined on the blackboard.

A MATTER OF APPROACH

In both of these hypothetical classrooms, the teachers share the same instructional goal — that their students become competent writers.

Hempstead is using a traditional approach of a teacher lecture followed by a format for students to follow.

Ryan's "reading-writing" workshop differs from the traditional approach in several ways. The students are actively engaged in learning by working in small groups and sharing information about different books. The task is designed to build critical thinking skills. And each student is asked not only to read a passage, but to analyze why it is effective or ineffective at catching their interest.

"Kid-centered" teaching

The writing workshop also is "kid-centered": the lesson is designed around the students' interests by directing them to examine closely the particular book each has selected to read.

In contrast, Hempstead's class illustrates the more typical "teacher-centered" approach, where there is a single model to follow in completing the lesson. All students look at the same example and follow a formula in their writing.

School climate is about relationships, explained Katherine D'Aoust, director of staff development for the Saddleback Valley School District in Mission Viejo, California. The classroom with the reading-writing workshop defines the relationship between teacher and student *differently* from the traditional lecture-oriented classroom.

"In the kid-centered classroom, the teacher selects material and contents based on developmental needs of the children," D'Aoust said. "In traditional classrooms, teachers use textbooks selected by the district and the state department of education, and the child sits there as the recipient of the information."

The reading-writing workshop in the example "is a much more exciting way to learn, and it's easier for teachers than lecturing," D'Aoust added. "The kids are engaged, they're excited, and they're teaching one another. The message also is being reinforced that what they are reading was written by a writer."

Using portfolios

Saddleback Valley is implementing a new curriculum that employs critical thinking techniques like the example given above. The district also is using student portfolios as a way to measure individual student progress.

Many districts are turning to the portfolio method as an alternative to traditional standardized and multiple-choice tests, which have come under fire for narrowing and oversimplifying the curriculum. Multiple-choice tests imply there is only one right answer to all problems or situations, critics say. Another criticism is that the kinds of questions asked tend to be more simplistic because of the limitations of machine scoring.

With portfolios, more complex skills can be encouraged and evaluated because the file becomes an expanding record that contains the student's actual work performed over time.

A traditional testing situation, for example, may not accurately reflect a student's writing skills because the artificial time limit makes it impossible to proofread and edit as would be expected in a work situation.

In addition, portfolios provide a vehicle for students to take more responsibility for their learning. "Students compile their own work and learn to set goals," D'Aoust explained. "In this way, they are becoming more autonomous learners."

Facilitating change

These new approaches are affecting climate indirectly because teachers are seeing their role change from dispenser of information to "facilitator, learner, researcher. Teachers are becoming more reflective, thinking about their instructional techniques," D'Aoust said.

"Just as teachers can best teach writing by writing themselves, you can't help kids be thinkers without thinking about thinking. Instead of lecturing, which does not promote thinking, teachers are using inquiry and cooperative learning techniques, presenting content in ways that intrigue students," D'Aoust added.

ACTIVE LEARNING TECHNIQUES

Students are more likely to have positive attitudes about school if they are active participants in the classroom rather than passive recipients of information. In addition, active learning techniques are proving to be more effective than passive ones.

"All genuine learning is active, not passive," Mortimer Adler wrote in his ground-breaking book, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto.* "It involves the use of the mind, not just the memory. It is a process of discovery, in which the student is the main agent, not the teacher."

Active learning techniques proving popular with students and teachers alike include cooperative learning, Socratic questioning, and thinking strategies.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Cooperative learning is based on the premise that a group of students working together can help each other learn new skills and gain insights through the group process. They are dependent on each other for success. Students not only are expected to learn the information or solve the problem but also to ensure that their teammates learn the information as well.

The technique also mirrors the way the workplace is changing. A national survey asked employers what they considered the top ten skills when looking for new employees. The traditional skills schools usually emphasize — reading, computation, and writing — were the bottom three on the list. The top three were (1) teamwork, (2) problem solving, and (3) interpersonal skills, all of which are reinforced through cooperative learning.

Teachers using cooperative learning generally divide their classes into groups of from two to six students to work on a project. Unlike ability grouping, where students are selected on the basis of similarities, cooperative groups typically include a cross section of students with a mix of gender, race, and abilities.

Care is necessary

Cooperative learning is not a panacea that will always work. It must be carefully implemented to avoid pitfalls. Simply dividing the class into equal groups, providing interesting information and problems to solve, and turning students loose is not likely to ensure success, according to experts such as R. E. Slavin of Johns Hopkins University.

Instead, there should be clearly stated goals and individual roles and grades for each student. Such guidelines ensure that one bright or conscientious student does not get stuck tutoring classmates or performing an inordinate amount of the work. It also minimizes squabbles about what each student is expected to accomplish within the team.

In classes of 30 to 40 students, "few students get the chance to contribute orally in class," noted Dave Mittleholtz of the San Diego, California, schools. "Within cooperative groups, all have a chance to listen, speak, and give feedback."

Tips for success

Teachers who have successfully implemented cooperative learning in their classrooms recommend paying attention to the following details:

- **Create a conducive physical environment.** Desks arranged in traditional rows do not promote discussion. Instead, classrooms could be arranged so students face each other to permit a free interchange of information. While this may seem obvious, a surprising number of teachers do not take into account how the physical design of the classroom affects the comfort level of students participating in discussions.
- **Spread natural leaders among groups for balance.** In heterogenous groups, it is important that students with strong communication skills and those with the potential to develop these skills are not clustered but are spread evenly among the class. The teacher may need to invest some extra time "training" students for their roles in groups, but this time can pay off by igniting enthusiasm in students who may have been marginal academically.

  "It has been my personal experience that some of the 'poorer' students (by grade point standards) have really blossomed by the experience," said researcher Louis Gallien, Jr. "As their self-esteem grew, they improved their academic performance. For once, they feel a responsibility to others and, as a result, possess a greater sense of personal worth as they are given key roles in the classroom."
- **Link group and individual success.** To be effective, cooperative learning requires individual responsibility and grades, but the project should be structured so that success for the group requires cooperation from all. When students realize they will "sink or swim together," two things happen. The reluctant or lazy student can be brought along by peer pressure. Conversely, shared responsibility reduces each person's individual risk, which can lead to more creative approaches to solving a problem. Ideally, the assignment is structured to provide a collective "second chance" so students will feel comfortable taking risks.

QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES

Research indicates that 80 percent or more of the questions asked in American elementary and secondary classrooms are designed to elicit recall of a fact or another short answer. That means only one-fifth or fewer of classroom questions challenge students to look for deeper meanings or the larger issues — in other words — to think.

At the same time, researchers analyzing numerous studies from the National Assessment of Educational

Progress found a striking decline in inferential reasoning skills among 13- to 17-year olds tested between 1971 and 1980.

Some teachers instinctively will ask good questions, but the above statistics suggest that natural experts are in the minority. There is an art to asking questions effectively, one that teachers can learn. It includes creating an atmosphere of trust so students will feel comfortable taking a risk where there are no absolute right and wrong answers.

Timing also is critical. Simply pausing longer after a question is asked before calling on someone will encourage more students to try to come up with the answer.

It is clear that schools and districts must make thinking skills a priority, providing training and resources to teachers if the level of challenging discussion is to be increased in most classrooms.

Is it worth the effort? Scholars note that skillful questions in the classroom can:

- Arouse student interest.
- Motivate students to research issues related to the topic.
- Clarify concepts related to the lesson.
- Challenge students to think.
- Train students to distinguish between trivial information and big ideas.
- Help students learn to acquire intelligent meanings from data rather than just remembering facts.

Socratic questioning

Another way questions can invigorate a classroom is through the Socratic seminar, a technique employed in schools using elements of the Paideia Program. Socratic seminars are discussions where the teacher and students are equals. The goal is for participants to gain a greater understanding of ideas and values.

For example, a high school history class might read about the Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I. During the discussion, students could examine what happened from all points of view, exploring what was positive and what was negative about the treaty that planted the seeds of World War II.

In addition to actively involving students and causing them to analyze and consider ideas and issues, this method creates the third advantage: engaging students of varying abilities on a level playing field. The field is level because students discuss attitudes and opinions and a common source of information.

"In the seminar, you're working with a different kind of understanding, a conceptual understanding," said Patricia Weiss, former director of the National Center for the Paideia Program.

"The learning and sharing in the discussion isn't as leveling as some of the traditional types of instruction that are memory-based. The questions are wide open, easier for all to address."

For example, if the teacher asks a question related to something students just read, they give an opinion. The teacher responds by asking, "Why? Where in the text do you find evidence to support that?" Students deal with that at their own individual level.

"There's a real ranking that goes on in schools," Weiss continued. "The seminar is one of the few times that I've seen where students can come together and students who are not the academic stars can meaningfully participate."

"Group dynamics change. The most popular student is not automatically looked at as the leader in the seminar discussion," Weiss explained. To implement Socratic seminars successfully, staff development for teachers should focus on the group dynamics likely to occur so teachers can foster participation by students of all ability levels.

EXPECTATIONS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Classroom climates — and student achievement — improve when teachers use their most effective teaching strategies with their low-achieving students as well as with their high-achieving ones. While this may seem obvious, in practice teachers favor the more successful students without even realizing it.

During a 10-year study, more than 3,000 teachers across the country were observed in their classrooms. "We didn't find *one teacher* who practiced good teaching as frequently with low achievers as with high achievers," Sam Kerman, a co-founder of the Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA) training program, said in an interview.

For example, teachers know that calling on students to answer questions, express ideas, and give opinions is motivating because it involves them in classroom activity. When asked in workshops why they thought low-achieving students were called on less frequently, the answers were very logical:

- It might embarrass the low achiever.
- The whole class benefits from a good response.
- High achievers volunteer more.
- With a large amount of material to cover, I can't afford to call on those who are unprepared.

The problem with this approach is that low achievers "tune out" of the classroom because they know they will not be called on. The lack of a response becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

actions that communicate a "personal regard" for the student. The content includes research on the technique's effectiveness, examples, and role-plays.

Since most teachers are familiar with the techniques, an emphasis is placed on discussing why teachers might not be using these techniques as frequently with low-achieving students.

Following each seminar, participants observe each other a minimum of four times, focusing on the types

Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement Interaction Model

Monthly Workshops	Strand A Response Opportunities	Strand B Feedback	Strand C Personal Regard
Workshop #1	1. Equitable distribution	1. Affirm/correct	1. Proximity
Workshop #2	2. Individual help	2. Praise	2. Courtesy
Workshop #3	3. Latency	3. Reasons for praise	3. Personal interest and compliments
Workshop #4	4. Delving	4. Listening	4. Touching
Workshop #5	5. Higher level questions	5. Accepting feelings	5. Desist (classroom management)

Workshop model

"Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement is a training program that makes teachers aware of biases in their behavior toward students and gives them a structure for changing it," Kerman explained.

Teachers attend five workshops, each approximately one month apart. During each workshop, three key teaching strategies are examined, one from each of three "strands" that include types of interactions with students: "response opportunities," "feedback" and

of interactions previously discussed. The teacher is trying to use the technique with all students, but the observer records only the frequency of interaction with target students. To reduce anxiety, it is stressed that the observations are for reporting purposes, not for evaluation.

Students show gains

After a three-year study in Los Angeles, 2,000 low-achieving students whose teachers attended TESA

showed statistically significant academic gains over their peers in control classes.

There were nonacademic benefits, too. While the program's main purpose is improved student achievement, "TESA improves the climate of the school by enhancing teachers' feelings about their students and reducing teacher stress levels," Kerman noted. "We can document that students of teachers who have been through TESA have fewer discipline referrals and better attendance. The teachers have fewer sick days as well."

The program has evolved to a three-day training of TESA coordinators, who can then implement what they have learned in their districts. Information on TESA, including a seminar schedule, can be obtained from Sam Kerman, Director of Kerman Associates, P.O. Box 5748, Diamond Bar, CA 91765.

Gender and expectations

The same kind of biases demonstrated toward low-achieving students have been found in studies of teachers in their interactions with females and with minority students. The Gender/Ethnic Expectations and Student Achievement (GESA) training is similar in approach to TESA in that it emphasizes teacher behaviors that reflect their expectations of student performance. GESA addresses these areas of interaction and behavior:

1. **Instructional opportunities**
   - Response opportunities
   - Acknowledgment/feedback
2. **Grouping and organization**
   - Wait or "think" time
   - Physical closeness
3. **Discipline**
   - Touching (that which communicates encouragement, such as on the shoulder or arm)
   - Reproof (verbal or nonverbal disapproval that is calm and respectful rather than emotional)
4. **Self-concept**
   - Probing (staying with a student, offering clues, rephrasing the question until the student is able to respond)
   - Listening
5. **Evaluation of performance**
   - Higher level questioning
   - Analytical feedback

In addition, GESA sessions raise perceptions about possible biases in instructional materials and how they can be adapted to create a more equitable atmosphere in the classroom.

When GESA was being developed, pretraining observations found that teachers were from four to nine times more likely to call on boys than on girls. Following training, teachers report an increased use of non-stereotypical interactions and materials.

Students whose teachers have completed GESA have showed significant gains in achievement test scores. Information on GESA and a workbook for administrators called *The Equity Principal* are available from GrayMill Educational Consultants, Dolores A. Grayson and Pamela R. Miller, 2029 Hickman Rd., Des Moines, IA 50325

EMPOWERING STUDENTS

Students will be more engaged in the classroom if they have some control over their learning. The dominant model under which most teachers were trained is to follow a textbook, lecture, and test. The format is predictable, and many students do no more than they have to just to get by.

A more risky but potentially rewarding approach is to give students choices and the freedom to design their learning, within a structure. In this environment, students can find the increased power and freedom a heady experience in which they take responsibility for their own learning.

"I learned that center stage belongs to everyone," Jane Juska, a Concord, California, teacher, wrote in *Improving Writing Instruction*, about a one-semester experiment with her class of non-college bound students at Ygnacio Valley High School.

Early in the year, Juska presented a list of available books and let the students decide which book to read and whether they all wanted to read the same book or different ones.

The first day they met in small groups and mapped out a plan of attack. It included rules about class discussions, vocabulary tests, a schedule for completing the book they chose, and how homework and class time would be spent. The groups shared their ideas and selected the best elements for a single study plan.

Each group was responsible for some aspect of teaching. One group explained a chapter and led a discussion; another group selected the words for the vocabulary test.

Ebbs and flows

Over the semester, the system evolved. While initially critiqued each group's work and had

keep reading logs, both of these eventually were dropped. In their place, the groups wrote to her about their work and she wrote back.

At one point, the students abandoned the structure and little was accomplished for several days. Juska casually asked how things were going, and the students recognized the problems and suggested changes. Late in the year, the students asked Juska to

Student Questions Transform Classroom Dynamics

As part of a reading assignment, teachers typically ask questions that determine whether students have read the assignment, recall the information presented, and understand the point. Classroom discussions can give students deeper insights into the material by raising issues that might otherwise not be obvious.

Although guided questioning by teachers has its advantages, the benefits apply primarily to the article or book being discussed at the time. Ideally, students should be taught how to develop their own questions, so the process can become a natural part of all reading assignments. In this way, students will become active participants in the reading, asking themselves questions before, during, and after reading.

Below are techniques recommended by Samuel of the University of in Eugene:

...er modeling of questioning. The teacher takes students through a reading selection, shows them the kinds of questions that are appropriate for a specific content area, and models the thinking processes involved in constructing the questions.

2. **Teach how to construct questions.** One good place to start is by having students turn statements into questions. For example, the statement "All matter is made up of atoms" could be revised to "What material makes up matter?" The same method can be used as a study skill by turning chapter headings and subheadings into questions.
3. **Practice using questioning words.** Students can practice formulating sentences using who, what, where, when, how, and why. They also should discuss and analyze the types of answers required of the reader.
4. **Ask questions that elicit a question, not an answer.** Pictures, cartoons, illustrations, titles, and chapter headings can be used to stimulate the student's own questions. For example, the teacher can refer to an illustration in a book and ask, "What would you like to know about the illustration?"

Classroom discussions give students deeper insights into material by raising issues that might otherwise not be obvious.

5. **Have students ask and answer questions of each other.** Student A asks a question of student B, who answers, then follows up with a question of student A. This continues until the information in the reading material is exhausted. Teachers should take part in the question-and-answer exchange to model good questioning.
6. **Launch a question-only challenge.** This procedure sets up a challenge in which students obtain information important to them solely through questions. The teacher announces the topic and the rules. Students must learn all they can on the topic by asking questions, after which they will be given a test. The test includes all information the teacher considers important, whether or not questions on that information have been asked.

The students ask questions and the teacher answers fully, but without undue elaboration. The test is then given. A discussion follows regarding the questions raised and those that should have been asked.

In step four, students are directed to read their texts carefully or listen to a short lecture to discover what they failed to learn in their initial questions. In the final step, the teacher gives a follow-up test. The scores of the two tests are combined. The outcome of the two tests provides a good measure of the how well students have grasped key ideas and facts.

From: Samuel A. Perez, *The Clearing House,* "Improving Learning Through Student Questioning," pp. 63-64, Oct., 1986, Vol. 60.

go back to the old way. "I try it for a couple of weeks and we are all miserable, bored, and disappointed in ourselves," Juska wrote.

"The (students) learned that while power is at first a heady thing, it soon becomes hard work," Juska noted. But they also found that "once you've experienced power, second best is no longer good enough and just maybe having power is worth the trouble."

"I learned that, with some guidance, kids will choose what's good for them," she continued. "I learned that believing in them will not result in mayhem. I learned that center stage belongs to everybody and that sitting in the critic's seat is a heavy responsibility. And I learned that if you have the patience and trust and determination to put it all together, you get great theater."

Now, Juska routinely gives power to her classes. "I charm, urge, and finally insist that they accept the responsibility that goes along with power," she explained. "If they do, we're all home free."

Worth the risk

As these examples show, creative teachers, willing to take risks, can transform the climate of the classroom through making students more responsible for their own learning and through teaching techniques that make students active learners.

Administrators improve classroom climates by providing training that gives teachers insights into their own unconscious biases and helps them overcome expectations and actions that can have a negative effect on at-risk students.

Before trying to improve climate, it is important to know what parts of school life represent strengths to be celebrated and where there are weaknesses to be improved. The next chapter describes ways districts and schools are evaluating their climates.

CHAPTER SIX

Measuring CLIMATE

AN IMPORTANT FIRST STEP

School improvement efforts start with gathering information to identify strengths on which to build and weaknesses to correct. In addition to looking at student characteristics and academic performance, it is important to "take the temperature" of the school — to assess the attitudes and satisfaction of staff, students, and parents. Measuring the climate can give valuable information on how receptive the school community will be to change.

Nearly half of the superintendents and principals (44 percent) who responded to the AASA climate and culture questionnaire reported conducting climate surveys at the school or district level during the previous three years.

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents (61 percent) used the surveys for a specific action plan, while 38 percent used them in planning staff development activities.

Respondents overwhelmingly surveyed teachers (87 percent), while the opinion of parents was included in 71 percent of the climate surveys. Two-thirds of the administrators surveyed students, while only one-third surveyed other district employees, including secretaries and food service, custodial, and maintenance staff.

Three-fourths of the surveying schools and districts used written questionnaires, either distributed at school or mailed to the home. One-fourth obtained the information through personal interviews.

Nearly all of those who survey (85 percent) shared their results with members of the community, with about half sending the information in a newsletter and half sharing the information through meetings.

INTERVIEW VS. QUESTIONNAIRE

The Connecticut Department of Education developed a personal interview form to survey teachers on effective school characteristics for school improvement planning. "The teachers loved it," said Joan Shoemaker, a school effectiveness specialist with the department. "Someone was spending an hour to hear them

talk about school issues. However, we discovered it took three people three full days to survey the 24 teachers at the average elementary school."

Because it was so time-intensive, the department developed a written survey seeking the same information. Over time, the staff found the results were very similar and the written questionnaire was more efficient in terms of time and resources.

"There's a definite place for personal interviews if you need in-depth information from a small number of individuals," Shoemaker said, but she recommends the written survey for large groups.

Effectiveness indicators

A number of schools and districts have keyed their surveys to school effectiveness characteristics, including positive school climate. The Orange County Public Schools in Florida uses separate color-coded written questionnaires for teachers, parents, and students.

The 33-item student questionnaire measures seven effectiveness indicators and characteristics:

- Safe and orderly environment.
- Positive school climate.
- High expectations.
- Frequent assessment/monitoring of achievement.
- Emphasis on basic skills.
- Maximum opportunities for learning.
- Parent/community involvement.

Sample questions

The surveys consist of declarative sentences, such as "An atmosphere of respect and trust exists." Respondents complete a machine-readable answer sheet on a continuum of one to five, where one stands for "strongly disagree," five represents "strongly agree," and three is neutral.

Student surveys. Here are some sample statements that Orange County students are asked to agree/disagree with using the 1-5 scale:

- School conduct rules are fair.
- My parents know about the school's discipline rules.
- My parents support the school's discipline rules.
- Teachers respect all students at our school, no matter who they are.
- I am proud of the way my school looks.
- My teachers expect me to do my best.
- My teachers expect me to learn as much as I can.
- My textbooks and/or workbooks are interesting.
- My parents are active in school events.

Parent surveys. Orange County parent surveys include questions on the seven indicators asked of students, plus questions to measure perceptions of instructional leadership and parent/community involvement. Parents indicate whether they agree or disagree with the statements on a scale from 1 to 5. The statements include:

- The principal has a strong role in instruction.
- Decisions about instruction are made based on information from parents, community, and teachers.
- The principal and teachers make good instruction the most important school priority.
- Teachers tell students what they are expected to learn.
- Students are informed how they are expected to behave in school and at school activities.
- Students are disciplined in a fair and consistent manner.
- An atmosphere of respect and trust exists.
- Social and cultural differences are respected.

Machine-readable surveys enable schools to collect information on the gender and ethnicity of the persons completing the questionnaires. For some questions, such as those dealing with the fairness of discipline, educators should examine whether perceptions differ among ethnic groups.

For example, if the survey analysis reveals a bias with the fairness of discipline, a school improvement committee can start developing action programs on multicultural awareness. Such a plan can enlist the help of parents and community members in programs to reinforce pride in the students' heritage and increase staff members' cultural understanding and sensitivity.

Teacher surveys. The Orange County surveys ask teachers about the nine characteristics on the parent survey, as well as their opinions on the district's professional development programs and how much they are involved in decision making. Again, a five-point scale is used. The statements include:

- Frequent communication occurs between faculty and administration.
- The principal is involved in the instructional process.
- Administrators complete fair and meaningful evaluations of each employee.
- The principal encourages teachers to participate in leadership roles.
- Students and teachers have a positive attitude toward school.
- Teacher and student attendance is high.
- School facilities contribute to a positive school climate.

- Expectations are high, appropriate, and achievable.
- Parents actively participate in establishing school policies and procedures.
- Professional development is tailored to the needs of the school.
- Teachers are involved in school planning and budgeting.
- Teachers perceive that they can influence school decisions.

Part of the planning process

"The climate surveys have been part of the strategic planning process used by school advisory councils to identify priorities for a school and develop action plans," said Jacquelyn Hughes, associate superintendent for planning and government relations in Orange County.

The district has trained advisory councils and principals in strategic planning. Additional training has been given to principals on the change process and on how to maintain "viable school advisory councils," Hughes continued.

"Strategic planning — and the climate surveys that identify problems to address — have created a climate for change throughout the district," added Wes Blamick, senior manager for strategic planning.

Recommendations for change

The Connecticut Department of Education works with public schools on school improvement at all levels. At the elementary level, the department recommends climate surveys based on effective schools characteristics, as discussed earlier in this report. For middle schools, Connecticut has developed sample surveys based on the eight recommendations in the 1990 Carnegie Corporation study, *Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century*. The surveys seek to learn the extent to which each of these recommendations has been implemented.

- **Create a community for learning** by fostering a place where close, trusting relationships with adults and peers create a climate for students' personal growth and intellectual development.
- **Teach a core of common knowledge** by including learning to think critically, lead a healthy life, behave ethically and lawfully, and assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a pluralistic society.
- **Ensure success for all students** by eliminating tracking in favor of cooperative learning groups, flexible scheduling, and expanded opportunities for learning.
- **Empower teachers and administrators** by trusting the adults who know them best to make decisions regarding experiences of students.
- **Prepare middle grade teachers** by educating them about adolescent development and providing mentorships and instruction in academic teaming.
- **Improve academic performance by fostering better health and fitness** through student access to health services and by promoting healthy lifestyles.
- **Re-engage families in middle grade education** by keeping parents informed, offering meaningful roles in school governance, and giving opportunities to support learning at home and school.
- **Connect schools with communities** by providing opportunities for youth service, collaborating with health and social service agencies to provide access for students, and expanding career guidance and resources for students and teachers.

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH

The Anne Arundel County, Maryland, Public Schools developed surveys to measure climate along four dimensions: academic, social, physical, and affective. The district's Instructional Leadership Program, which trains department chairs, originally developed the surveys to learn how students perceived their schools' learning climate. School leaders used survey results, along with other information, to determine local educational goals.

Like the Connecticut model, the surveys have since been expanded to include versions for staff and parents as well as for students. Improvement teams at the local level analyze the results for setting goals and developing action plans.

How they mesh

The affective dimension, or the feelings and attitudes students share about the school, results from perceptions about the academic program, the social context, and the school's physical environment — the other three dimensions.

For example, many believe the presence of high expectations, rewards, and praise for students, along with the monitoring of pupil progress, contribute to a positive academic dimension. Opportunities for input and participation in goal setting affect how faculty

members regard the social/emotional dimension of the school.

The elements of the four dimensions become a template from which the survey questions are drawn to ensure that data on all aspects contributing to school climate are measured. In this way, school teams are able to address particular elements of a negative climate by pinpointing the source of the dissatisfaction.

The chart on the next page describes the elements for each dimension.

Sample questions

Student surveys. The Anne Arundel elementary student survey has three questions measuring student perception of school cohesiveness and seven measuring opportunity for participation in classroom activities. These are two of the six components of the affective dimension. Below are some questions from the student survey, showing the element and dimension measured:

- Do you feel school is important? (cohesiveness/affective).
- Do you believe getting good grades in this school is usually due to hard work rather than luck? (participation/affective).
- Do you usually keep your desk clean? (environment/physical).
- Does your teacher usually give you enough time to answer when you are called upon in class? (student-teacher interaction/social).
- Do students in this class help one another when they need it? (student-student interaction/social).
- Does your teacher usually help you when you are practicing your classwork? (monitoring progress/academic).
- When you have done a good job, does the teacher tell you that you've done a good job? (rewards, praise/academic).

Parent surveys. The 20-question parent survey in Anne Arundel tracks opinions on the four dimensions with questions such as these:

- Do you feel the professional staff (administrators, teachers, and counselors) of this school respects the community? (respect/affective).
- Do you feel this school does a good job in educating the children? (morale/affective).
- Do you feel there are generally enough textbooks provided for your child? (materials/physical).
- Are you aware of what this school's goals are for this year? (goals/social).
- Are you satisfied with the amount of communication coming from the school concerning your child's progress? (monitoring pupil progress/academic).

Teacher surveys. The 96-item faculty survey contains the following questions regarding the four dimensions:

- Do you feel the adults (administrators, teachers, counselors, secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers) in this school treat each other courteously? (respect/affective).
- Do you think that this school does a good job of educating children? (morale/affective).
- Are there opportunities in your school to work with faculty members of other departments/grade groups? (input/social).
- Do you feel this school makes an effort to meet the needs of individual students? (expectations/academic).
- Do you regularly communicate to students the criteria used to evaluate their progress? (monitoring/academic).
- Do you feel interruptions to classroom learning time (P.A. announcements, assemblies) are kept to a minimum? (orderliness/ academic).
- Do you have an adequate area to plan for instruction? (resources/physical)
- Do you feel the professional staff tries to keep the school attractive? (environment/physical).

According to the Maryland Department of Education, the Anne Arundel climate surveys are the most widely used in the state because of their comprehensiveness in measuring all four dimensions of climate. The surveys can be machine-scored also and can report results by subgroups such as grade, gender, ability, and race.

Addressing climate issues

Once the survey results are back, teams from the school develop climate improvement goals and specific action plans for dealing with identified problems. The Maryland State Department of Education recommends two general strategies for improving school climate:

1. Development of school-based resource teams to assist teachers.
2. School-based staff development.

Both strategies rely on research findings showing that successful school change efforts share these common characteristics:

- Clear goals and expectations.
- Collaborative planning and problem solving.

DIMENSIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE

Factors that collectively measure the school's social emotional health

Dimension	*Element*	*Definition*
AFFECTIVE		*The feelings and attitudes reflected by the students of the school.*
	Caring	Each student in the school should feel that the adults in the school are concerned about him/her as a human being.
	Cohesiveness	The students feel the adults in the school have a positive unity and commitment to education.
	High Morale	Students in the school feel good about what they are doing.
	Opportunity for Participation	Students feel they have the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to succeed.
	Respect	Students feel that other individuals in the school can be counted on to behave in a way that is honest and fair.
	Trust	Students have confidence that individuals in the school can be counted on to behave in a way that is honest and fair.

The program, processess, and materials that influence the learning climate

SOCIAL		*The communication between and among persons in the school*
	Student-Teacher Interaction	The interactions between the student and the teacher are open and friendly.
	Student-Student Interaction	The interactions between and among students are friendly in nature.
	Opportunity for Input	Students have an opportunity for their ideas to be considered.
PHYSICAL		*The physical and material aspects of the school.*
	Physical Environment	The students perceive the school to be clean and orderly.
	Materials	The school has enough materials available for each student.
ACADEMIC		*The program, processes, and materials that together influence the learning climate.*
	Academic Emphasis	The students perceive the primary focus of the school to be on instruction.
	High Expectations	There are reasonable but high expectations for each student to succeed.
	Rewards & Praises	Students receive appropriate recognition for their accomplishments.
	Orderliness	Students perceive the rules and consequences for behavior to be clear.
	Monitoring of Pupil Progress	Students receive consistent and ongoing feedback on their progress.

From:Anne Arundel County, Maryland, Public Schools

- Flexible programs based on local choice.
- Training, technical assistance, and follow-up.
- Development of internal change facilitator capabilities.
- Systemwide support.

Training for teachers

In Maryland, the state department of education and local school districts provide training on the change process, as well as on instructional and classroom management strategies and techniques for school improvement teams.

After action plans are developed, the teams take on the responsibility for providing staff development and follow-up for faculty members. This ensures that teachers receive sufficient training and support to add the classroom management strategies and instructional techniques to their repertoire. Over time, teams develop their own expertise in effecting change.

In school-based staff development, instructional leaders emerge and serve as resources to classroom teachers. These leaders can provide professional development on a wide range of climate improvement and instructional techniques and collaborate with the principal to see that improvement efforts stay on track.

"These school-based leaders ensure the transfer of training by establishing a norm for collaboration and engaging in peer coaching so teachers can practice in their classrooms the techniques they learned in staff development sessions," explained Peggy Walters of the Maryland Department of Education. "In this way, teachers acquire the skills to deal more successfully with students' academic and behavioral needs, creating a positive school and classroom climate that promotes student success and reduces student disruption."

Projects that Maryland school teams have developed through the process of conducting climate surveys and developing action plans include:

- Peer coaching programs where teachers observe and provide feedback to each other on specific issues of instruction and classroom management.
- Peer counseling/buddy systems for students.
- Projects that involve students in evaluating their own work.
- New ways to recognize academic achievement.
- "Adopt-a-Kid" programs.
- Programs to monitor the use of effective praise techniques.
- Means of teaching students appropriate communication and coping skills.
- Activities to improve student self-concept.
- Courses in study skills for students.
- Buddy systems for students with poor attendance.
- Student team-learning programs.

SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT

The Jefferson County, Kentucky, Public Schools use different written climate surveys to assist with site-based management. One survey gives principals the chance to evaluate both the central office and school-level decision making. Other surveys enable teachers and parents to evaluate school-based decisions from their perspective.

These school-based leaders ensure the transfer of training by establishing a norm for collaboration and engaging in peer coaching so teachers can practice in their classrooms the techniques they learned in staff development sessions.

On the principal's survey, school administrators evaluate how responsive central office departments are in meeting the needs of the local school. Principals indicate whether they receive the support they need from the central office — always, usually, sometimes, seldom, or never — in areas such as:

- Assessment
- Employee relations
- My supervisor
- Instruction
- Staff development
- Superintendent's office
- Early childhood education
- Transportation.

The principal's survey also asks administrators to report on the same continuum whether they involve staff and faculty in planning school programs and whether the school staff practices "shared decision making through input, decision/rationale, and recourse."

"We've spent a lot of time discussing what shared decision making means," Robert Rodosky, Jefferson County's director of research, said in explaining the

three-part question "Shared decision making is a total process, but there are also parts to the process.

"The opportunity for input is only one aspect of shared decision making. If people ask questions, we want them to get answers," Rodosky continued. "We want them to feel like the answer isn't arbitrary. Giving a rationale for a decision is one way to make people feel decisions are reasonable rather than arbitrary. Also, there should be an opportunity to appeal decisions, which is recourse. The idea is to make people feel good about the decision-making process."

Seven criteria

Jefferson County has developed surveys for teachers, parents, support staff, and elementary and secondary students to evaluate how well their school is doing on seven effective schools criteria:

- Academics
- Presence of instructional leadership
- High expectations
- Degree of ownership each group has in the school
- Discipline/safety
- Effectiveness of communications between key groups
- Overall satisfaction in the school.

For example, parents and secondary students are both asked to respond on a five-point, agree-disagree scale to these statements:

- The homework my child is assigned helps him/her learn (academics).
- Problems in our school can be solved (satisfaction).
- If asked, I would tell my friends I have a good school (ownership).
- I have the opportunity for input in decision making in our school (ownership).

Staff opinions

Surveys are given to teachers and support staff, using the same seven criteria. Support staff are asked to respond to 31 statements including:

- A strong educational program is offered at my school (academics).
- A positive learning atmosphere exists at my school (satisfaction).
- My work is appreciated and encouraged by the faculty and staff of my school (leadership).

Teachers are asked if they agree or disagree that:

- Following classroom observation, the principal (or assistant principal) provides formative feedback (leadership).
- Our faculty and staff work together effectively (communications).
- Teachers feel they can make a difference in achievement in our school (expectations).
- Curriculum offerings in our school meet the needs of most students (academics).
- Most of my students care whether or not they learn (expectations).

Comparative information

Each school receives a profile indicating how teachers, students, and parents responded on the seven criteria compared with the district average for all elementary, middle, or secondary schools.

Profiles also include data on standardized test scores in reading, writing, and math; attendance rates for three years; student mobility; and retention rates.

"The school profiles enable schools to compare themselves with other schools in the district," Rodosky explained. Scores below the district average would pinpoint areas the school might want to address in the next year's improvement plan. Schools are encouraged to complete the questionnaires annually and are expected to do so at least every two years, Rodosky added.

Evaluating the learning climate

The Learning Climate Inventory can be used for school-based action planning or staff development. It is brief (20 questions) and can be completed in 10 to 15 minutes during a faculty meeting. The questions elicit teacher perceptions on the degree of autonomy they have and their freedom to innovate in the classroom.

The five characteristics measured are:

- **Leadership.** Extent to which teachers perceive leadership behaviors in the school's administrators.
- **Freedom.** The amount of freedom teachers feel they have to experiment and determine their own instructional activities.
- **Evaluation.** The extent of involvement teachers have in evaluating administrators, and students have in evaluating teachers.
- **Compliance.** Amount of pressure teachers feel to conform to rules of the system.
- **Cooperation.** Extent teachers are supported in efforts to team teach and use resource people.

The survey contains a seven-point scale of "never" (1) to "always" (7) with questions such as:

- You are free to experiment with teaching methods and techniques in your classroom.
- You are free to bring supplementary materials (paperbacks, magazines, newspapers, films, slides, video, computers) into your classroom.
- You are encouraged to "teach to the test" to improve student achievement.
- You participate in the administrative decisions affecting your classroom teaching.
- You are free to discuss controversial issues in your classroom.
- You are supported in your efforts to employ team teaching or other mentoring/cooperative teaching plans.
- You are free to use your own judgment in evaluating and grading each student.
- Your teaching is evaluated by a mutually agreed upon set of objectives.
- Your principal keeps the teaching staff working together as a team to improve the learning climate.
- Building inservice programs are planned to help you improve the teaching/learning process in your classroom.

Principals are asked to answer the questions as they think their faculty members will, and the principals' perceptions are compared with the teachers' responses. The questionnaires are tabulated by an impartial third party to encourage frank responses by the faculty. The principal receives a report with average scores of the responses, which protects the identity of the teachers.

Conversation starters

For action planning purposes, the low scores can be starting points for discussion, said John R. Hoyle, a professor of educational administration at Texas A&M University, who developed the survey. "The principal may say, 'Why did you tell me (through the responses) that the classroom needs to be totally quiet? I'm telling you you ought to have fun,'" Hoyle explained.

"The teachers say, 'When the principal walks down the hall, we think: he doesn't want to hear a pin drop.' Often, the problem is one of misperception," Hoyle commented. "You don't clear those up unless you talk about them.

"They can talk about each survey item, and you don't pin anybody down because the point of discussion is mean scores from all the faculty," Hoyle notes. "It's great for staff development."

The Learning Climate Inventory uses a seven-point scale, rather than a five-point scale. The wider point range gives the schools a "higher inference in research parlance," Hoyle explained. "It's a finer distinction of attitude, knowing exactly why people answer the way they do, which forces people into more thinking processes."

He added that the LCI has fewer items, only 20 questions compared with as many as 60 to 90 on some other school evaluation instruments.

Districts also can use the LCI to compare schools. With results from 15 to 20 schools, comparisons can be made of the school climate, such as the background and leadership style of the principal, Hoyle added.

CLASSROOM FEEDBACK

Hoyle developed another survey that gives individual teachers an opportunity to measure student perceptions on both the climate and the level of cognitive learning being required of them in the classroom. Like the Learning Climate Inventory, where principals anticipate teacher responses, teachers give the Secondary School Attitude Inventory (SSAI) to one or more of their classes and then complete the survey themselves, anticipating the students' answers.

In the SSAI, students are given only four choices, "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," with no neutral answer, to force them to state an opinion. The questions are coded CI for Climate and CL for Cognitive Learning. Among the 30 statements students must agree or disagree with are:

- The class actively participates in discussions (CI).
- The teacher emphasizes memorization (CL).
- Every person in the class is treated equally as a person (CI).
- Logical reasoning and analysis are highly encouraged (CL).
- Class decisions are made by all students (CI).
- Students are encouraged to discover the alternative solutions to problems (CL).
- Joking and laughing occur in class (CI).
- Certain students impose their wishes on the whole class (CI).
- Students have little idea about what the teacher is trying to teach. (CL)
- The classwork relates to the real world (CL).

Use of the SSAI is designed to be nonthreatening for both teachers and students. "Teachers can distribute the surveys themselves and send the surveys directly to

A&M for scoring. The principal does not even see how individual students are rating the classroom," Hoyle noted. Teachers can choose to administer the survey only to a particular class or to all students.

Disagreements common

The cognitive levels are based on the classic Bloom's taxonomy. "In almost every case, there is a mismatch," Hoyle said. "Most teachers tend to think they are teaching levels four and five (analysis and synthesis) — even level six (evaluation)," Hoyle said. "When they give the SSAI, students perceive the classroom environment in terms of levels one and two — knowledge and comprehension.

"I have concluded that most teachers and school systems are so test-driven that students don't always recognize that teachers are trying to get them to think more critically in higher order ways," Hoyle mused. "Teachers perceive themselves teaching to problem solve. Students don't receive that message because they're so concerned about the test at the end of the unit.

"That's been really good to see the mismatch. Teachers are glad to know that, so they can begin adjusting what they're doing in order to get students to think in more high-ordered ways. That's the real benefit — staff development."

Setting goals

Teachers can use the SSAI to set goals they will work on in the ensuing months. Principals can discuss survey results with teachers as part of their supervisory function. In one Houston high school, 100 teachers each gave the SSAI to a selected class and completed the same survey themselves. The surveys were coded for each class, and since the teachers used a different color of ink, the responses for each class could be tabulated and compared.

Based on the results, each teacher sets personal growth goals in an individual action plan. For example, one teacher was surprised to learn that students said classroom discussion is discouraged. "The teacher's initial reaction may be, 'I don't discourage discussion.' But on further reflection, he or she might remember, 'Well, there were a couple of times I really nailed them,'" Hoyle explained.

The teacher might then consider how to alter his or her teaching style to include cooperative learning groups where students can have more discussions. "It's not perfect," Hoyle said of the survey. "A lot of the information is subjective. But if you don't have some benchmark data, you really are pushing at ghosts."

Principals and curriculum and staff development coordinators can use results from SSAI to identify training needs. Results from several classrooms may identify common needs for skill development or information. Such information can be used to design training sessions.

Atmosphere of trust

Another effective use of the SSAI is when principals meet individually with teachers to suggest ways teachers can improve the climate or level of challenge in the classroom. Central to such an approach is establishing an atmosphere of trust so that the teachers are comfortable sharing the "grades" given by their students and are willing to take a risk and try new classroom techniques or approaches.

"Any improvement process has to have trust," Hoyle commented. "The atmosphere has to be nonthreatening." One way to build that trust is to point out strengths identified in the survey, as well as areas where improvement is desired.

In a hypothetical evaluation conference, Hoyle suggested this type of approach: "You succeeded here but apparently you feel you have a need here. I appreciate the risk you're taking. I would like you to visit school A or B, and I'll cover for you."

The principal also might offer a videotape, articles, or a training session. "The key is to remove the threat, to use lead-managing rather than boss-managing," Hoyle concluded.

ALCOHOL, DRUGS, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The school environment, and especially the extent of drug and alcohol use, is a critical factor in any school improvement effort. That is why the Portsmouth, Virginia, City Schools survey parents, students, and staff on drug awareness and the school environment as part of the district's overall approach to school improvement.

As the introduction to the parent survey explains, "This study is designed to determine the strengths and weaknesses of your child's school so that the effectiveness of the school can be increased. The study also is

designed to determine the awareness of drugs and drug usage by your child's peers."

Parents are asked to leave the answer sheet unsigned and to skip any questions for which they do not know how to respond.

The 76-question survey has seven sections that ask for demographic information and attitudes regarding drug issues.

Parents are asked to respond regarding the frequency ("never" to "a lot") for which:

- My child makes good grades in school.
- My child gets into trouble in school.
- My child attends a church or synagogue.
- My child goes out with friends.
- I am strict with my child.
- I talk to my child about the dangerous effects of drinking alcohol. (A separate question asks about drugs.)

Parents are asked to express their opinion on a range of issues, responding "no," "undecided," "yes," or "don't know" to questions including:

- Drug and alcohol use is the biggest problem facing youth in my community.
- It would be okay with me for my child to use alcohol if he/she would not use other drugs.
- My child has friends who drink (next question: use drugs).
- I want more information about the harmful effects of alcohol and drug use on students.
- I would attend training sessions on student drug abuse prevention if they were offered.
- I want to become more involved in student drug abuse prevention in my school or community.

Parents are asked to estimate the percentage of students in their child's grade who use various legal and illegal drugs, including cigarettes, beer, wine coolers, marijuana, cocaine, depressants, inhalants (such as glue), and hallucinogens (such as LSD).

Parents also are asked where they think students most often report using drugs, with the choices: home, school, in a car, with friends, and other. They also are asked to estimate how easy it is for students in their child's grade to get the 10 drugs named in the survey. Choices are: "can't" (get drugs), "fairly hard," "fairly easy," "easy," and "don't know."

Finally, parents are asked their opinion on the

How Effective Are the Following Strategies for Solving the Drug Problem in Your Community?

a. Not effective b. Somewhat effective c. Effective

_____ School-based education about the harmful effects of drug and alcohol use.
_____ Religious institutions providing drug education to young people.
_____ Parents providing drug abuse education to their children.
_____ Parents taking responsibility for their children's use of drugs and alcohol.
_____ Keeping parents/the public informed about the extent of the student drug-use problem.
_____ Support by civic and service organizations for drug and alcohol abuse prevention activities.
_____ Parent action groups involved in drug and alcohol prevention.
_____ Active involvement of business and industry in drug and alcohol abuse prevention.
_____ Training programs for teachers and other professionals in the community.
_____ Student action groups' involvement in drug and alcohol abuse prevention.
_____ Alternative activities for young people in the community. Early help programs for students beginning drug and alcohol use.
_____ Treatment for students who are drug and/or alcohol dependent.
_____ Fund-raising to provide resources for school/community prevention.
_____ Laws prohibiting use of alcohol by minors.
_____ Laws prohibiting use of illicit drugs.
_____ School policy on student use of drugs and alcohol.
_____ Law enforcement to keep drugs away from students.

Staff Environmental Survey

a. Agree b. Disagree

_____ Parent-teacher conferences result in specific plans for home-school cooperation aimed at improving student classroom achievement.
_____ Most parents understand and promote the school's instructional program.
_____ Most of my students' parents are involved in an overall home and school support network.
_____ Many parents initiate contact with this school each month.
_____ I am enthusiastic about my work as a public school teacher.
_____ Public schools cannot really expect more than about 75 percent of all students to graduate.
_____ I am satisfied with my job in my school.
_____ I am satisfied with my control over my professional life as a teacher.
_____ In my job I am treated like a professional.
_____ Support is given to innovative ideas in my school.
_____ In this division (school district), the central office supports the teachers.

effectiveness of various community strategies for solving the drug problem, rating the 18 strategies in the box on the previous page as not effective, somewhat effective, or effective.

Staff surveys

The staff surveys are completed by teachers, administrators, and other school-based employees, including secretaries, nurses, librarians, and guidance counselors.

In addition to the drug awareness questions asked of parents, the staff members are asked about a number of school effectiveness and climate issues, such as safety, the condition of the building, parent attitudes, and the staff members' level of satisfaction with the school and their general expectations of students. The above box lists some of these questions.

Measuring Morale and Collegiality in Portsmouth

a. Rarely occurs b. Sometimes occurs c. Often occurs d. Very frequently occurs

_____ The mannerisms of teachers at this school are annoying.
_____ Teachers have too many committee requirements.
_____ The principal sets an example by working hard himself/herself.
_____ Teacher-principal conferences are dominated by the principal.
_____ Routine duties interfere with the job of teaching.
_____ Teachers interrupt other faculty members who are talking in faculty meetings.
_____ Student government has an influence on school policy.
_____ Administrative paperwork is burdensome at this school.
_____ Teachers help support each other.
_____ Pupils solve their problems through logical reasoning.
_____ The morale of teachers is high.
_____ The principal goes out of his or her way to help teachers.
_____ The principal explains his or her reasons for criticism to the teacher.
_____ The principal is available after school to help teachers when assistance is needed.
_____ Teachers socialize with each other on a regular basis.
_____ The principal uses constructive criticism.
_____ The principal talks more than listens.
_____ Teachers respect the personal competence of their colleagues.
_____ Teachers are protected from unreasonable community and parental demands.
_____ The principal is friendly and approachable.

Another series of questions assesses the degree of collegiality felt by staff members, teacher morale, and the management style of the principal.

Student surveys

Separate drug awareness surveys are designed for upper elementary students (grades 4-6) and secondary students (grades 7-12).

Elementary school students are asked questions similar to those in the parent survey, in terms of students' success in school, religious involvement, and where they think their peers find drugs and alcohol. Students are asked directly whether they have used cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs. The four choices range from "did not use" to "1-7 times a month."

Students are asked whether they think they will try any of these substances in the future and whether they think each of seven substances is unavailable, easy, or hard to get. The final set of questions asks students: "Why do you think kids your age start to use . . . cigarettes, chewing tobacco, beer, wine coolers, liquor, marijuana, and other drugs?" Possible responses are that their peers want to:

- Look older.
- Feel good.
- Be like their friends.
- Get attention.
- Other reason.

Secondary students are asked more detailed questions on their family life and experimentation with drugs and alcohol. The survey asks whether the students' parents live together or apart, whether father and mother both have jobs, and what is the educational level of their parents.

Other questions determine the habits, communication, and self-esteem of the students. On a five-point scale of "never" to "a lot," students are asked whether they play on a sports team, date, bring friends home, like the way they look, or feel lonely. They are asked whether parents or teachers ever talk with them about the harmful effects of using drugs.

An important section asks students "When did you first . . . smoke cigarettes, drink beer, drink liquor, smoke marijuana, and use cocaine or a number of other illegal drugs? Responses range from "under 10 " to "19 years and older."

Drug prevention and treatment experts say the age of first use is an important marker of addictive and problem behavior. The younger the first use, the more likely the student will move beyond mere experimentation to chronic use, often with disastrous results.

INDIRECT CLIMATE MEASURES

Interviews and surveys provide direct evidence about aspects of climate being measured. Useful information also can be obtained by indirect or nonobtrusive measures. These techniques involve examining physical evidence at a school, studying written records, and recording observations of school life to assess the extent of positive or negative climate characteristics.

Such methods are nonobtrusive under two circumstances:

1. The technique must not interfere with the characteristic being measured.
2. The information must be gathered in a natural setting.

Unobtrusive measures appropriate for a middle school setting are described by Cathy Vatterott in *Schools in the Middle*, a publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

"Physical traces are evidence that builds up or wears away as the result of a group's behavior," she wrote. For example, a magazine that is barely hanging together in the school library offers mute testimony that it is the most popular. The type of magazine may indicate student social/emotional or academic needs that are being met.

Archives, the second type of evidence, exist as formal records kept by the school, such as records for

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shool attendance, frequency of office referrals, or suspensions, and informal records kept by individuals, such as a counselor's notes and the principal's records of disciplinary meetings. "Both types provide a history,

of sorts, of the events of the school," Vatterott noted.

"Observations are among the most reliable and easily managed forms of unobtrusive data," she continued. "The principal simply watches what is going on and records it in some meaningful way."

For example, an urban middle school undergoing desegregation used observations to measure the effectiveness of a peer bonding project. Researchers counted the number of racially mixed groups who socialized in the cafeteria before and after the project began. The number of racially mixed groups that formed during students' free time increased four-fold, indicating the program had a positive effect on student social interactions.

Climate indicators

Because unobtrusive observations are less concrete, they require more care in planning, Vatterott advised. She recommended having the principal — in consultation with the faculty — identify school practices that are indicators of a supportive climate.

For the climate area of belonging, for example, the principal would ask: "What can I see that will convince me that the school encourages student belonging?" Such indicators are then listed, along with a plan for their observation.

Here is an example of one goal, the practices that would support it, and indicators to show that it works:

CLIMATE GOAL: Students have a sense of belonging to the school.

PRACTICES: Opportunities are given for students and teachers to socialize outside class.

INDICATORS:

- Time is provided for socialization.
- Space is available for teachers and students to mingle.
- Clubs and activities exist for teachers and students to interact in nonacademic settings.
- Each student believes there is one adult in the building to whom he or she can go for help.

Ideally, the school will identify several practices for each desirable climate characteristic, such as trust, respect, belonging, acceptance, and recognition.

An observation checklist

While the previous example illustrates how an observation format can be tailor-made to an individual school's priorities, there are general observation checklists as well. The School Climate Observation Checklist on pages 89 and 90 from *Skills for Successful School Leaders* by authors John Hoyle, Fenwick English, and Betty Steffy, measures the degree of openness and orderliness present in a school. Other questions are provided for reference and are not scored.

CAN CULTURE BE MEASURED?

The examples cited in this chapter have focused on measurements of climate — what some observers refer to as the "personality" of a school. Chapter 3 described an anthropological approach to studying the culture of a school, which relies more on intuitive skills than concrete measures.

Can culture be measured through surveys and interviews?

Most writers who have studied culture in corporations and public schools recommend against paper-and pencil-measures. It is possible to *describe* a culture, the argument goes, by describing its artifacts, customs, heroes, and heroines. But experts say it would be a mistake to try to attach numerical values to an organization's culture.

They feel that because cultural values evolve over a period of time and are deeply embedded in the belief systems of the individuals involved, culture does not lend itself to measurement.

Not by the numbers

The danger of trying to reduce things to numbers, according to culture expert Terrence Deal, is the effect it can have on the emotional commitment of those charged with motivating students.

"I teach as a profession," Deal emphasized. "I love to see it when a light bulb goes off in one of my student's heads. It makes my day. The joy of watching a kid learn is the most heady experience in the world. No successful business runs based on quarterly reports, but on the visions that have been handed down."

Schools should have visionary leaders, but having a vision isn't enough to ensure that the school will be truly effective. What is needed, in addition to vision, is a solid understanding of the dynamics of the change process.

There are many opportunities for reform efforts to derail. The next chapter provides some guidance for keeping school improvement on track.

School Climate Observation Checklist

(Note: information can be gathered by observations and interviews.)
Directions: Check each item appropriately as it applies to your school. Scoring directions are at the end.

1. **Amount of Open Space for Instruction in the Building.**
   _____ 100%
   _____ 50%
   _____ 10%
   _____ 0%

2. **Instructional Group Size (Note: Indicate by percentage of time in each.)**
   _____ Large group, more than 30 students
   _____ Medium group, 16-29 students
   _____ Small groups, 2-15 students
   _____ Individual

3. **Staff Organization**
   _____ Extensive use of team teaching
   _____ Moderate use of team teaching
   _____ Limited use of team teaching
   _____ No team teaching

4. **Grouping**
   _____ Determined by continuous assessment of student achievement
   _____ Determined by occasional assessment of student achievement
   _____ Determined by limited assessment of student achievement
   _____ Determined by normed tests at the beginning of school year

5. **Noise in Classrooms**
   _____ Noise level is comfortable
   _____ Noise level is disorderly
   _____ Noise level is distracting
   _____ Noise level is silent

6. **Seating in Classrooms**
   Students are:
   _____ Seated on floor
   _____ Seated on "homey" furniture
   _____ Seated in movable desks or tables
   _____ Seated in fixed stations

7. **Instructional Materials**
   _____ Wide variety of teaching materials
   _____ Multiple texts
   _____ Extensive use of AV equipment, including computers
   _____ Instruction is confined to single text

8. **Teaching Strategies**
   _____ Wide variety of teaching strategies in all classrooms
   _____ Moderate variety of teaching strategies in all classrooms
   _____ Limited variety of teaching strategies in all classrooms
   _____ No variety of teaching strategies in all classrooms

9. **Student Movement**
   - _____ Students are free to move about as they wish
   - _____ Students may move freely with teacher's permission
   - _____ Student have little opportunity to move about

10. **Teacher work Areas**
   - _____ Used by more than 20 teachers
   - _____ Used by 11-19 teachers
   - _____ Used by 5-10 teachers
   - _____ Used by less than 5 teachers

11. **Instructional Time to Promote Mastery by Students**
   - _____ Extensive use of flexible instructional time
   - _____ Moderate use of flexible instructional time
   - _____ Limited use of flexible instructional time
   - _____ No flexible instructional time

12. **Use of Media or Resource Center**
   - _____ Heavily used by students all day long
   - _____ Heavily used by students during portions of school day
   - _____ Limited use by students
   - _____ Rarely used

13. **Teaching and Learning Time**
   - _____ No classroom time is taken from instruction by outside influences
   - _____ Little classroom time is taken from instruction by outside influences
   - _____ Considerable time is taken from instruction by outside influences
   - _____ Too much time is taken from instruction by outside influences

14. **Instructional Goals**
   - _____ Instructional goals are clear and understood by all students
   - _____ Instructional goals are clear and understood by most students
   - _____ Instructional goals are clear and understood by a few students
   - _____ Instructional goals are not clear and students are confused

15. **Community Resources**
   - _____ Resource people are used extensively
   - _____ Resource people are used occasionally
   - _____ Resource people are used rarely
   - _____ Resource people are never used

16. **Inservice Education for Staff**
   - _____ Extensive use of inservice for morale building and cooperative problem solving
   - _____ Moderate use of inservice for morale building and cooperative problem solving
   - _____ Occasional use of inservice for morale building and cooperative problem solving
   - _____ Morale building and cooperative problem solving are never stressed

Scoring:

1. Items 4, 5, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, and 16 are scored by giving four (4) points if the first choice is checked on down to one (1) point if the last choice is checked. The higher total score indicates a more open and businesslike climate.

2. Items 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 12 are checked but given no weight. The evaluator uses the information as background or context for the scored item.

Adapted from: Skills for Successful School Leaders. *AASA, 1985, 2nd edition 1990.*

CHAPTER SEVEN

Culture & THE COMMUNITY

Climate and culture develop and evolve at the school site, but they do not exist in a vacuum. Forces outside the school — including the attitudes and actions of parents, community leaders, and groups — serve to influence a school's reputation and, to some extent, its effectiveness. Efforts to improve climate and to shape cultural norms must consider existing cultural norms and community attitudes, and enlist key parents and community leaders in the change process.

Parents and community members exert a strong influence on the culture of a school. A school's reputation is a combination of actual strengths of the instructional program, student achievement, and the perception the community has about that school.

For example, a high school in an upper income area whose students typically score well on college-entrance examinations may enjoy success because teachers set high standards and are effective in challenging and instructing the students. But another significant factor is the high expectations parents, community members, teachers, and students bring to the school based on its past history. Students coming into that school know they will be expected to work hard and do their best, and teachers expect that the students will enter prepared to do college-preparatory work.

RAISING STANDARDS

Cherry Creek High School outside Denver, Colorado, described in detail in Chapter 2, had a good reputation in the community, but standards were starting to slip. New Principal Hank Cotton raised some dust by cracking down on lax attendance and introducing professional development and higher standards.

He was able to convert parents to his point of view — that rules should be stricter and should be enforced — because parents and the principal shared the same cultural value: students must attend class and apply themselves in high school if they are to succeed in college and later life.

Teachers initially objected to Cotton's efforts to trim an excessive number of electives from the curriculum as an intrusion into a domain that had long been under the control of individual departments. While some were never comfortable with the new system and eventually transferred to other schools, most eventually were won over because of a shared cultural value that the curriculum needed to be more rigorous. After a few years, the new standard had became so embedded in the culture of the school and the community that new teachers felt pressure to "measure up."

A Culture that "Highly Values" Education

Attitudes of parents and the community can play a role in shaping the culture of an individual school. But the values of the community at large, as well as local traditions, can be powerful culture shapers for an entire metropolitan area.

Denver-elected officials and business and school leaders visited their counterparts in Minneapolis to study metropolitan cooperation in schools. The visitors were impressed with the level of enthusiasm that resulted from partnerships between parents, corporations, educators, and political leaders in Minnesota's largest city.

"We're still living off of a culture here that has always highly valued education," Curt Johnson, director of the Minneapolis Civic League, told the visitors from Denver. "That probably explains as much as money."

The openness works both ways. When a businessman criticized local schools for not teaching information relevant to the working world, the schools challenged him to design the perfect school.

A *Rocky Mountain News* reporter accompanying the group gathered the following evidence that the community values education greatly:

- Minneapolis Mayor Donald Frasier told the group he devotes half his time to education.
- To start a "corporate school" in a downtown building, two of the city's Fortune 500 companies pledged grants of $100,000 per year for three years.
- Honeywell has a school for teen mothers in its downtown building, and businesses regularly give schools technical assistance.

The openness works both ways. When a businessman criticized local schools for not teaching information relevant to the working world, the schools challenged him to design the perfect school. Now, students at the "open community" school spend parts of each day outside the classroom on projects such as mapping city parks or being an archeologist for a day.

Minneapolis has been offering school choice for 15 years. Many of the magnet schools are the result of collaboration with the business community and organizations.

Community support of education is not limited to the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. The state of Minnesota claims the highest graduation rate in the nation.

PARENTS AS PARTNERS

Successful principals can bring about change more effectively when they are able to enlist parents as partners in setting and reinforcing the cultural norms that promote good attendance and achievement.

From the time they help their offspring to learn to walk and talk, parents are a child's first teachers. "They help their children to channel energies into constructive activities by reading and talking to them, teaching them to extend common courtesies, encouraging them to raise questions, and sharing social and religious rituals with them," wrote child psychiatrist James Comer in a 1993 *Newsweek* special section on education in America.

"Children who have had such experiences are better prepared for school. Teachers appreciate such children and convey their approval to the children and their parents. In turn, parents sanction the work of the teacher and the school by getting involved. The link is critical," Comer emphasized. "If it is absent, good learners at home can become poor academic performers."

Reinforcing discipline

As children grow older and move into middle and high school, educators often have more difficulty involving parents in the school, although the link between home and school is no less vital. In fact, the older the child gets, the more important it becomes to reinforce shared values to complete homework and abide by school rules.

Often, especially in low-income communities, schools and parents must surmount barriers to become partners. The barriers can stem from cultural misunderstanding, suspicions, and stereotypes.

Educators often complain that parents will not back them up when their children are a discipline problem. Instead of siding with the school, many parents get defensive and try to find fault, undermining the standards the school is trying to enforce.

To bridge this divide, schools need to look at the situation from the parents' vantage point.

Reaching out

For some parents, the bulk of contacts they have with the school are negative. They receive phone calls or mailed notices advising them that their child has been skipping school, making low grades, or getting into trouble. Schools that make an effort to reach out in positive, individual ways to parents can find a surprising shift in attitude.

Wilson Middle School in San Diego, California, developed an assertive discipline plan to improve behavior in the classrooms. One new element was that teachers would make calls to parents to report positive self-discipline early in the year, especially with families where students had behavior problems in the past. Teachers called to let parents know their child had been doing a good job of participating in classroom discussions, paying attention in class, and completing work on time.

The new approach "totally changed the climate of the 1,300-student school," said Janet Chrispeels of the San Diego County Office of Education. Parents became allies rather than adversaries.

Improved community relations were dramatically evident at Open House. Previously the school, in a low-income area of the county, would attract just a few parents to the Open House. The first year after the positive phone calls began, 700 attended the event. They didn't set out to improve parent attendance at school activities, Chrispeels noted. It was a byproduct of the improved relations between parents and the school.

Poverty and School Success

Families from all social and economic levels can and do play positive roles in their child's education by the rules and practices they encourage at home.

Researcher Richard Clark studied low-income African American families in Chicago housing projects where some children succeeded in school while others did not. In the 1983 study, *Family Life and School Achievement,* Clark identified these factors as significant in contributing to the children's school success:

- Parents and children playing games together.
- Establishing specific schedules, such as a homework time and morning and bedtime routines.
- Assigning family chores.
- Supervising television viewing.
- Encouraging reading, even if the parent was not fully literate.
- Talking with the child about schooling and other issues.
- Visiting the school and being an advocate for the child.
- Fostering hobbies and other extracurricular activities.
- Visiting parks or museums or other family outings.

Home curriculum

Similarly, researcher H.J. Walberg found a "curriculum of the home" — consisting of parenting practices and the communication of family values — that contributed to student success in school.

Writing in *Phi Delta Kappan* in 1984, Walberg described the important factors as:

1. Parent and child having conversations about school events.
2. Encouraging leisure reading and discussing its content.
3. Monitoring and jointly analyzing television viewing.
4. Postponing gratification to achieve long-term goals.
5. Expressing affection and interest in the child's academic and personal growth.
6. Parent and child having fun together.

In Walberg's study, these factors were found more often in higher socioeconomic families, but when they were found in the lower income homes, the children were more likely to experience school success.

Educators have long known that the cultural values found at home affect the culture of the school both positively and negatively, depending on the family in question. These studies show that positive cultural values can be found in homes from all ethnic groups and income levels. The challenge is for schools and communities to help families nurture those values that will help students succeed in school.

CULTURE AND ECONOMICS

There are real differences in the culture and climate of schools that are strongly influenced by the economic levels in the community, according to San Diego's Chrispeels, a nationally recognized authority on parent and community involvement in the schools. "Culture and climate of schools are defined by the interaction of home and school, which, in turn, are shaped by some deep-seated beliefs," she said.

"There are certain underlying assumptions in schools serving low-income parents and high-income parents that are almost never examined," she explained. "There is much more congruence between teacher beliefs and parent beliefs in high-income communities. So often, expectations don't need to be discussed because both parents and teachers hold high expectations. It is predisposed by the income levels of the parents.

"In high-income communities," Chrispeels continued, "there is a certain ambivalence between teachers and parents. They can collaborate because there are more common expectations, more common understandings, and teachers find it easier to involve parents because there are more shared values."

On the other hand, teachers can be intimidated by high-income parents because of the political clout they can wield in a crisis. Unhappy well-to-do parents are a greater threat to teachers than are low-income parents because the middle-class and upper-income parents sometimes know better how the system works.

In low-income communities there is more suspicion and lack of understanding between parents and teachers because the communities are more diverse. "There are language barriers that prevent parents and teachers from even developing a common language or a shared understanding because they can't communicate with each other," Chrispeels observed.

Involvement — or lack of it

The result is that parents in high-income communities play a more active role in shaping the climate and culture of the school because they have the resources to be more actively involved and the knowledge of how the system works.

In low-income communities, the culture often is shaped through a *lack* of parental involvement, stemming from an expectation by the school staff that parents can't or won't be involved.

"We know that parents in low-income communities can play a positive role if the school actively reaches out, taking the time to make the school a comfortable environment for parents," Chrispeels added. In these schools, both sides win. Teachers get the opportunity to know parents and the community better, and parents convey a positive attitude about the school to their children.

Do they really care?

Unfortunately, the more common response is to assume that parents don't care or that they cannot become involved. For example, in one Southern California district that is 85 percent Hispanic, the assumption was that parents were apathetic and were not involved in the education of their children.

A survey was mailed to parents — in both Spanish and English — at the end of the school year. Because of the timing, the district was not able to make follow-up calls, so they did not expect a high return rate for the five-page questionnaire.

The district has approximately 6,000 students. Surprisingly, more than 3,000 surveys were returned, half of those completed in Spanish. The survey was not translated into Asian languages, so the return rate among those groups was fairly small. Still, a 50 percent return is unusually high for a mailed survey. "The district was somewhat blown out of the water by the response," said Chrispeels, who was serving as a consultant to that district at the time.

Teachers completed a companion survey. The most disturbing finding for the superintendent was the striking difference between parent and teacher responses to parallel questions.

"Parents reported helping children with homework. Their attitudes were overwhelmingly positive," Chrispeels reported. "They felt the teachers cared. They also wanted more communication from the school and from teachers." By contrast, more than 65 percent of teachers felt parents could not help with homework and indicated that parents were not very supportive of the school.

"We have a real communication and perception gap here," Chrispeels noted. "The parents feel they want to help and can help, but they need more tools."

The parent and teacher surveys used in in San Diego County were patterned after some developed by Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University for use in schools that had predominately African American. Those surveys found similar discrepancies in parent attitudes

Involving Parents in the Inner City

Goldblatt Elementary on the West Side of Chicago does not fit the stereotype of inner city schools that lack parent involvement. At Goldblatt, parents are everywhere: volunteering in the computer lab, helping with discipline in the lunchroom, and making items for the students in the parents' own arts and crafts room.

"Having the parents is fantastic," said Principal Lillian Nash. "They don't just come when there's a problem. Also, their presence has a noticeable effect on the children. It has cut down dramatically on suspensions."

Paideia with parents

Goldblatt uses the Paideia Program, in which students and teachers explore major human themes in literature and art through the Socratic seminar. The discussions build thinking skills while debating ideas and values.

When Nash arrived at Goldblatt, the school had been part of the Paideia Program for a number of years, but test scores remained disturbingly low. She decided to place a priority on the fifth goal in the school improvement plan: getting parents involved in their children's education.

Improving communication with parents would help them understand the purpose and importance of Socratic seminars, Nash reasoned. Parents also could follow up at home with homework if they knew it was being regularly assigned.

The school sponsored an evening program with a Socratic seminar designed particularly to appeal to parents. The theme was the Civil Rights movement, and the seminar was based on a key event — the death of Black Panther Fred Hampton — that happened in their part of Chicago. Dinner was served after the program and 50 parents attended, about 10 times more than typically came to such meetings.

"That broke the ice," Nash said. Parents are invited to visit school on Wednesdays to observe their child's seminar, and they are welcome to drop in to the Parents Room anytime to work on a project or just relax.

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and teacher assumptions about parent attitudes, Chrispeels said.

BRIDGING THE GAP

To build strong partnerships in low-income and multicultural communities, schools need to take the initiative in making parents feel welcome. Some schools have developed parent centers: a room or area of the school designated for parents where they can come and feel they belong. In other schools, there are formal programs with volunteers or paid coordinators to plan workshops for parents.

In still others, the parent room is a drop-in place where parents can stop by, have a cup of coffee, and visit. A school that encourages parents to volunteer regularly can provide a parent center for volunteers to meet with teachers and to store materials.

Home-school communication

Teachers are the front line of communication between school and home because they have information of greatest interest to parents — news affecting their child. Principals can encourage greater communication between home and school in several ways:

- Set an example, sending regular notices home letting parents know of upcoming dates such as testing days and parent-teacher conferences.
- Offer to make "good news" calls for teachers.
- Purchase portable phones, making it easier for teachers to call parents during the school day.
- Install voice mail systems for teachers, allowing them to leave recorded messages for parents and to receive such messages.
- Make increased positive contacts with parents part of the school improvement plan.
- Make increased teacher-parent communication one of the objectives on which teachers are evaluated.
- Encourage teachers to send notes home for parents to sign, informing them of major projects students are assigned, along with requirements and grading criteria. Parents can help students budget their time if they are alerted in advance to the scope of the project.

Making parents feel welcome through parent centers and evening programs can improve attitudes and the climate of the school, leading to such positive developments as improved attendance and discipline.

Gains in student achievement are harder to track, because the link between parents coming to school and student achievement is indirect.

Programs linked to achievement

Making parents feel welcome through parent centers and evening programs can improve attitudes and the climate of the school, leading to such positive developments as improved attendance and discipline.

Gains in student achievement are harder to track, because the link between parents coming to school and student achievement is indirect. Such achievement gains have been documented in programs with parent centers, the more effective approach is to involve parents in projects that are directly tied to the instructional program.

Family Math. One national program that encourages family involvement is Family Math. Schools can purchase the Family Math books in English or Spanish from the EQUALS project at the University of California at Berkeley. The EQUALS staff also can recommend individuals who can provide training around the country.

"Family Math" is a program for students in kindergarten through grade 8, with hands-on activities that parents and children can do together. It is designed to build problem-solving skills and to reinforce basic math concepts.

Family Math includes six to eight sessions, 90 minutes to two hours in length, conducted by teachers, parents, or community volunteers who have been trained in program techniques. The activities are designed to be fun for parents and children to do together in a relaxing atmosphere with other families. The program also suggests easy ways parents can reinforce math skills while doing daily tasks in the home.

In most schools, Family Math classes are taught within grade level groupings, depending on the size of the school and the number of staff members available to conduct the sessions. Topics in most classes include arithmetic, geometry, probability and statistics, measurement, estimation, and logical thinking.

The activities are stimulating and enjoyable. Part of the purpose is to help parents and their children to overcome math phobias and recognize the value of strong math skills.

Project Impact. A similar program, Project Impact, takes the Family Math concept a step further. Home-based activities are assigned by the teacher to complement classroom instruction. Used in some 2,000 schools in England, Project Impact "has shown increased math gains where it has been systematically implemented," Janet Chrispeels of San Diego County said.

The idea is to place the child in the role of teacher in carrying the activity home from school. Also, the activities are fun, so they are not intimidating to students or parents. One exercise on the worth of money, for example, has students trace their own hand and one of their parent's hands. Each traced hand is covered with coins and the value of the coins is added up to determine the "value" of each hand.

On succeeding days, the activities are reinforced in

the classroom through the regular curriculum. The children write in a journal about what they did at home, the methods used, and the results. The children make graphs showing the various sizes of child hands compared with the adult hands.

Referring to the home-based part of the lesson, Chrispeels noted, "It's in the process of the child becoming the teacher that they really learn the math. Children increase their understanding of math concepts by having to explain the assignment to their parents."

Another important aspect of Project Impact's success is that the parent involvement is school-initiated. "Schools must provide teachers materials and training on how to do more 'family friendly' homework to increase the likelihood that such ventures to make parents-as-partners will be successful," Chrispeels concluded.

Cultural values and communication

In multicultural schools, teachers need to talk to parents of different cultures to see how they want to be involved. "Schools should not make assumptions that parents don't care because they don't come to 'our' meeting," Chrispeels cautioned. "To many parents, 'Open House' doesn't mean anything. They have no words to translate it in their language."

In addition to language barriers, cultural values themselves may shape a parent's response to and understanding of messages sent home from school.

In Hispanic cultures, homework is considered the child's work that must be done alone. "The tendency of middle-class Anglo parents is to rush in and help the child as soon as he or she gets stuck," Chrispeels noted. Teachers complain that projects are assigned and parents may do more of the work than their children.

Thus, if the class includes Hispanic and Anglo children, the teacher may be comparing apples and oranges, work students did alone with parent-assisted projects.

To help or not to help?

If the teacher expects parents to help with homework, that expectation should be clearly communicated to parents. In classes where parents may not be comfortable helping with homework, such as high school math courses, teachers need to assign homework with which students can be successful without their parents' help.

Appropriate homework is work for which students will have an 85 to 90 percent success rate, said Chrispeels. "If the student is not able to do the work, it's not good independent practice. Homework should be practice of skills they have mastered."

"Most teachers aren't willing to take a look at this. They introduce the skill, give a little time to practice, and expect the child to finish the rest at home. They need to reinforce at home skills they've already mastered. Otherwise, you build in a lot of failure."

PARENT ILLITERACY

Parents who were not successful in school are themselves hesitant to have any contact with their child's teachers. Sometimes the hesitancy may stem from a distrust of school officials, but more often it is due to a feeling of inadequacy or even fear.

Parents who are functionally illiterate — an estimated 20 percent of the adult population of the United States — live in fear of being discovered. According to experts in the field, the stigma attached to illiteracy is greater than it is for drug and alcohol abuse, because the illiterate person is convinced that everybody else knows how to read.

Illiteracy is not only a problem for the adult, but it has intergenerational implications as well. Children start school at a disadvantage because their parents have not read to them at home. These parents are unable to help their children with homework, particularly as the student advances to upper elementary grades and beyond. The absence of reading materials in the home also sends the message — albeit unintended— that reading is unimportant.

Influence on children's achievement

The National Assessment of Educational Progress measures achievement among American students ages 9, 13, and 17 years old in reading, writing, math, and other subjects. Students are asked to report the highest education level their parents have completed. One consistent theme across many subjects and age groups is that students whose parents have completed high school and college consistently score higher than students whose parents have not.

As the 1988 NAEP test of reading proficiency shows, the disparities in student proficiency continue even to age 17, when parents' ability to help with reading would seem less important.

The Colorado Adult Literacy Commission conducted a series of regional hearings to probe the extent of adult illiteracy in the state and its effects on individuals, families and communities.

Most of the children enrolled in the Adams County School District 12 Chapter 1 program, which works with at-risk elementary students, "have parents who have difficulty reading and writing," said program coordinator Nancy Hawkins in the report, *Silent Crisis: Adult Illiteracy in Colorado*.

Conversely, at the school district's High Plains High School, many adult students "say their children's grades have improved since they've enrolled," according to Carolyn Lambrecht, coordinator.

Educating parents

At another hearing, one parent fought back tears as she told commissioners that her own daughter decided not to drop out of high school when she saw the progress her mother had made in an adult education program. The adult literacy hearings demonstrated that communities could have a positive impact on the culture of the home, and improve its children's school performance, by providing educational support to parents.

This approach to helping the whole family can be done collaboratively by several community agencies. In Denver and Pueblo, Colorado, the local community colleges and school districts jointly provide a number of services for adults on public school campuses. At Cheltenham Elementary in Denver, the Community College of Denver provides literacy and English as a Second Language classes with assistance from the federally funded Amnesty Education program. The Denver Public Schools contributes both classroom space and the administrator who coordinates all evening activities.

At Bradford Elementary in Pueblo, parents and other community members receive basic skills instruction in reading, writing, math, and GED preparation through Pueblo Community College. Head Start provides parenting classes. Babysitting is provided free to adults through funds provided by the college and the Bradford Parent Teacher Organization (PTO).

In Fort Collins, Colorado, a number of community agencies are cooperatively providing a wide array of services to families with assistance from a federal Even Start grant. Adults and their preschool children attend one-hour weekly literacy activities at a neighborhood family learning center, followed by a weekly home visit from a family mentor. Project cosponsors are the Poudre R-1 School District and the Colorado State University Office of Occupational and Educational Studies.

Participants can study English as a Second Language or prepare for their GED certificate through Front Range Community College, Lutheran Family Services, and the Fort Collins Literacy Coalition.

At Miles Park Elementary, the active support for education works both ways. Parents organize summer enrichment programs and serve as tutors and classroom volunteers. They are involved in governing the school through the PTA, a School Community Council, and a citywide school improvement organization. In return, the school helps parents improve their own education through classes and offers all-day kindergarten and other child care assistance.

The school uses a variety of channels to keep parents informed: newsletters, conferences, an educational aide who makes home visits, and social and learning activities at school and at home. As a result of this communication and hands-on involvement, parents strongly support the academic program and the school's policies.

HIGH INCOME/LOW EXPECTATIONS

Studies of tracking have shown the problems that result when teachers and parents have consistently low expectations of students. A different kind of expectations trap is occurring in some high-income communities.

Often in schools, bright students will sail through an assignment that other students have to labor over to understand and complete. Over time, the bright students come to assume that performing a minimal amount of work is the way things should always be.

The cultural norm that evolves is that it's a bad idea to work hard to earn good grades. Consequently, students who want to apply themselves and learn the subjects well feel pressure to slack off.

"It's cool to wing it, to do the least work possible and get away with it," said Kelly Mercer, an Alexandria, Virginia, senior who was accepted at Princeton, Stanford, and Georgetown Universities, "If you work hard, others tell you to lighten up, go out and party, to forget about homework. Students will call to see how much you are doing." Mercer was quoted by English teacher Patrick Welsh in an article he contributed to *The*

Washington Post. "They want to make sure you haven't done more than they have," she explained.

Ability vs. effort

Welsh attributes part of the problem to colleges desperate for admissions, which communicate to students "in subtle and not-so-subtle ways that their ability, as measured by standardized tests, is much more important than the effort they put in studying."

Along the way, American students — and their parents — have acquired a skewed picture of the relationship between talent, effort, and achievement. "Bright American kids feel that good work is just supposed to emanate from them," said University of Michigan Professor Harold Stevenson. "If they do a certain amount of work, they expect an A. They think that if they are smart and they produce it, what else is there to do?"

At Michigan, Stevenson and his colleagues have conducted multinational research on the attitudes of Americans and other students toward hard work and schooling.

When Asian 11th-graders were asked what were the most important factors in math performance, a large percentage ranked "studying hard" at the top and "a good teacher" near the bottom. Answers from American students were almost exactly the reverse. "American students expect the teacher to bring knowledge out of them," Stevenson said. "It's supposed to be effortless on their part."

The parents' role

Parents can unwittingly reinforce this norm of laziness, pressuring teachers to give students higher grades than are deserved out of concern that the low grade will hurt the student's self-esteem. Others attribute the parents attitude to guilt at being away from home or worse, an unwillingness to invest the time in supervising their children's effort on schoolwork.

"If schools demand a lot from kids, it would be a nuisance for parents," said one Alexandria, Virginia, administrator. "They would have to be home more, turn off the TVs. They are too busy providing for the kid to make him study hard."

"Just to fail a kid takes so much paperwork that some teachers don't want to go through with it," said Pat Collins, a history teacher in Charles County, Maryland. "If you don't contact the parent, give administrators notices in triplicate, have a conference with the student, and follow a bunch of other procedures, the kid passes."

There is strong evidence that grade inflation has occurred in recent years. Welsh referred to one report that 24 percent of freshmen entering college in 1991 had an A average, double the 1969 percentage.

"I can tell you from my own experience that ruthlessness has its functions," Welsh wrote. Of all the new techniques recommended for improving writing, "none works better than the technique I learned 40 years ago ... give them a D or F on the first paper, and you'll see a miraculous improvement on the second."

The burden of ability

One problem with the emphasis on ability, rather than effort, is that the underlying message is non-motivating both to the high ability student and those who find all assignments challenging.

"Children who believe that their high ability is sufficient to insure success find little reason to work hard," wrote Stevenson and James Stigler in their book, *The Learning Gap: Why Our Schools Are Failing and What We Can Learn from Japanese and Chinese Education.* "Alternatively, children who perceive themselves as having low ability and doubt that they can master their lessons through continued effort also have little reason to work hard."

"In contrast," the authors continued, "Asian students, confident that the time they invest will lead to mastery of the academic curriculum, work long hours. Low scores are not regarded as a sign of stupidity, but simply as an indication that the student has not yet learned what will ultimately be possible through persistence and hard work."

Another consequence of this prevailing emphasis on innate ability rather than effort is that students come to regard not as skills to be acquired but the product of rapid insights. Students think a math problem must be solvable in 10 minutes or there must be no solution. Also, fewer students sign up for advanced classes because they are considered too demanding.

"I keep trying to tell my students that out in the real world, their bosses will judge them by the results of their work, not their test scores," Welsh commented. "But it is hard to convince kids when their parents — and most colleges — also believe that test scores are more important than producing."

CHANGING ATTITUDES

How can Americans turn this emphasis on ability versus effort around? The problem is subtle and deeply

embedded in our culture, suggesting that public opinion will not be changed rapidly.

Certainly a first step is raising awareness among parents, community leaders, and the media that this attitude exists and the debilitating effect such attitudes have on efforts to improve education.

Some schools are finding that awareness does make a difference in changing attitudes. In one affluent California community, educators discovered that most of their graduates were enrolling in two-year colleges without transferring to four-year institutions.

"The district started talking about it," San Diego's Janet Chrispeels said. "All the parents were in the fast lane. There was so much emphasis on material things, the community hadn't realized this was happening. Most of the parents had gone to four years of college, but their children were not following."

The district sponsored a series of workshops for parents on college education. The presentation urged parents to take a long-term view of their child's future; balancing long-term success with short-term goals. Through the workshops, the district was able to call parents' attention to the trend to attend two years of college, leave, and earn money, rather than pursue higher educational goals.

Parents responded favorably to the workshops, which showed them "what kind of messages they were giving to their children when they said it was okay to attend a two-year college," Chrispeels explained. By holding the workshops, the school district was enlisting the parents in an effort to change the cultural norm from one of getting out of school quickly and earning money to a norm that supported reaching each child's highest potential.

Value-added instruction

The preceding examples show there are subtle cultural norms that can negatively affect local schools regardless of the socioeconomic level of the community. In high-income communities, students, teachers, and parents sometimes can fall into a conspiracy supporting the minimal level of work as the path of least resistance.

The effort to raise expectations also can go awry if the kinds of assignments are inappropriate. For example, bright high school students may want to study recommended readings in more depth, rather than study college-level material, because students frequently have not had the life experiences necessary to appreciate fully the messages contained in more advanced material.

"What we need to be doing in every community is what I call value-added instruction," Chrispeels said. "The teacher needs to look at what knowledge the child comes with in determining what of value the school will add on." The move to more performance-based assessments, should assist teachers in fine-tuning instruction that better meets the needs of the students, she added.

MENTORS SHAPE VALUES

One way the community can help to shape an achievement-oriented culture at school is through mentor programs. Mentors, who serve as positive role models for students, generally are adults, but can be older students working with younger ones. The regular presence of a mentor on campus over a period of time reinforces constructive values the school is trying to instill in students, such as:

> ***All the parents were in the fast lane. There was so much emphasis on material things, the community hadn't realized this was happening. Most of the parents had gone to four years of college, but their children were not following.***

- The value of setting goals in life.
- The importance of persistence in being successful.
- How trying hard in school can lead to success in later life.

Such programs are most effective when mentors are paired with individual students with whom they meet regularly. Thus, each student has one adult who is not a family member or a current teacher who takes a genuine interest in him or her as a person.

Some mentor programs are career-oriented. Gifted and talented programs, for example, will sometimes pair a bright student with a professional in a field the student would like to explore. Others programs are geared more to personal goals, such as motivating students to try harder in school and to improve their attendance, behavior, and study habits.

Helping at-risk students

The USAA insurance company, San Antonio's largest employer, began a mentoring program in 1989

with two elementary schools serving at-risk students. Program materials define at-risk students as ones with "low academic skills and a poor attitude." Mentors are expected to meet a minimum of one hour a week with their students to tutor in-class work, and to be a friend and role model. The goals are to improve behavior, attendance, and academic skills and to lower the dropout rate.

By 1992, some 700 mentors were working with students in seven elementary, middle, and high schools where student behavior and performance had markedly improved.

The program now includes Junior Achievement volunteers and mentors from organizations throughout San Antonio. USAA's Educational Affairs staff provides information and assistance to other companies wishing to establish such partnerships with local schools. By early 1994, 39 additional organizations, including private businesses and local military installations, were providing more than 4,700 mentors to students in 100 San Antonio-area schools.

For more information, contact USAA Educational Affairs, USAA Building, San Antonio, Texas 78288.

Tips for mentoring programs

The benefits of a mentoring program are not automatically achieved. School and business partners need to consider carefully the goals of the program and provide training and communication to the mentors, students, and parents. Other tips are to:

- Include in mentor training the program's goals, suggested activities, and information on child development.
- Give mentors supervision, feedback, and an opportunity to problem solve with staff at the school.
- Start small and build on success. One business, for example, would begin work with one school.
- Designate an individual to coordinate communication between the school and any organizations supplying mentors.

CLIMATE AND ETHNIC TENSIONS

When students from several cultures attend the same school, conflict is always a possibility. Obviously, positive race relations or a history of ethnic tensions in the community will be a major influence on the attitudes students bring to the school.

A 1992 study by the National Center on Immigrant Students found that racial and anti-immigrant tensions were on the rise in America's public schools. One commentator noted that school leaders must strongly communicate that bigotry and intolerance are unacceptable if racial conflict is to be avoided.

"All too often, a conspiracy of silence surrounds racial issues," Cheryl A. Almeida wrote in the Spring/Summer 1992 edition of *New Voices*, a newsletter from the National Center for Immigrant Students. "Administrators fail to provide leadership ... by not setting clear standards that are swiftly enforced, they send teachers the message not to 'rock the boat' by confronting racism. In turn, teachers are then viewed by students as tolerant of racist behavior.

"Lack of leadership creates an environment which allows intolerance to flourish," Almeida continued. "Unless staff development and school curriculum are specifically designed to challenge bigotry and increase cultural understanding, the situation is inevitably perpetuated."

Simply recognizing ethnic holidays, heroes, and foods in isolation is not enough, Almeida added. Such efforts tend to emphasize cultural differences, rather than similarities, and present content outside of a meaningful framework. Instead, references to the history, ideas, and contributions of various ethnic groups need to be integrated throughout the curriculum.

Community members from ethnic and immigrant groups can be valuable resources in these efforts as speakers and sources of information. Including community members also can go a long way in building good will for the school and its goals.

A systemwide approach

The National Center for Immigrant Students, a project of the National Coalition of Advocates for Students, recommends a systemwide approach to building a positive climate that promotes acceptance of students from different ethnic, racial, and cultural groups. Steps must be taken on several levels to establish and maintain a tolerant environment.

1. **District policies** — The school board and administration can set the tone necessary to promote harmony by:
   - Developing a mission statement that values diversity in the school community.
   - Establishing school policies that clearly state racism will not be tolerated and will lead to serious sanctions.

- Encouraging and rewarding staff efforts to confront racism.

2. **Teaching strategies** — Training can encourage teachers to use strategies that actively address stereotypes and misconceptions, rather than ignore them. Strategies include:
   - Teaching understanding and respect for diversity as a basic goal of the school curriculum.
   - Creating opportunities for immigrant and nonimmigrant students to interact in social situations.
   - Integrating immigrant and U.S.-born children in problem-solving groups.
3. **Educational materials** — Learning tools should reflect multicultural perspectives that challenge inequities and incorporate stories of local immigrant communities.
   - Curricula should directly confront and challenge bigotry, prejudice, and discrimination.
   - Immigrant students can teach their peers about the immigration experience, and local histories of immigrant communities can be incorporated in the curriculum.
   - Educational materials, as a whole, should reflect all cultural backgrounds represented at the school.
4. **New perspectives** — Teachers and school staff must develop new ways of thinking about themselves, their students, and the communities in which they work. One way to help teachers be aware of cultural stereotypes is through the training program, Gender Expectations and Student Achievement (GESA) described in Chapter 5. Strategies recommended by NCIS include:
   - Providing high quality training for all school staff — not just teachers — that helps them combat prejudice and resolve intergroup conflict.
   - Providing time — and a nonthreatening environment — for teachers to examine their own racial and ethnic biases.
   - Providing long-term training for all school staff on the immigrant experience, including the special needs of immigrant students.
5. **Equitable discipline** — Set proper standards of behavior for the community by:
   - Establishing discipline codes with strong consequences for those who harass students using racial, ethnic, or anti-immigrant slurs.
   - Monitoring school disciplinary practices to determine the number of incidents involving racial epithets or slurs against immigrants.
   - Establishing discipline policies that emphasize positive behavior, preventive measures, and causes rather than symptoms.
6. **Involve ethnic parents and community** — Reaching out to parents and leaders in the immigrant community sends a message that the school values the rich resources available by tapping their expertise. For example:
   - Holding roundtable discussions with community representatives to examine and ease intergroup tensions.
   - Establishing communication with immigrant self-help organizations, drawing upon them for mediation assistance in resolving conflicts.

Conflict resolution

Teaching students and teachers constructive ways to resolve conflicts can reduce tensions not only between ethnic groups, but also among students within the same ethnic group. In schools where students practice conflict resolution techniques over a period of weeks, students show behavior changes and a reduction in fights and suspensions.

The Boston Conflict Resolution Program (BCRP) works with public school teachers, students, and administrators to help them deal with conflicts that often occur in schools. The BCRP, a project of the Boston Area Educators of Social Responsibility, views conflicts as a normal part of daily interaction, which, if handled constructively, present opportunities for growth and progress.

The program provides a three-day workshop in which teachers examine their attitudes toward conflict and develop skills in conflict resolution. There is a particular emphasis on responding to conflicts that are racial or ethnically motivated and on building a school climate that encourages mutual respect and values diversity.

Participating teachers agree to spend one hour a week working with their students on conflict resolution or related skills. Trainers with the program provide ongoing assistance to help teachers implement the new techniques in the classroom.

For more information, contact at the Boston Conflict Resolution Program, (617) 492-8820.

The National Center for Immigrant Students will mail its free newsletter, *New Voices*, upon request. Readers should indicate their interest in the newsletter

by writing *New Voices*, National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 100 Boylston St., Suite 737, Boston, MA 02116-4610.

EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS — EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Researchers are finding parallels between characteristics that are present in effective schools and those in effective families. For example, just as a "safe and orderly environment" is an important prerequisite to a well-functioning school, children thrive in homes where there is a regular routine and where parents have behavior standards they expect their children to meet.

A number of researchers have established a topology of home-school partnerships that defines ways parents and the school can collaborate for the mutual benefit of their children.

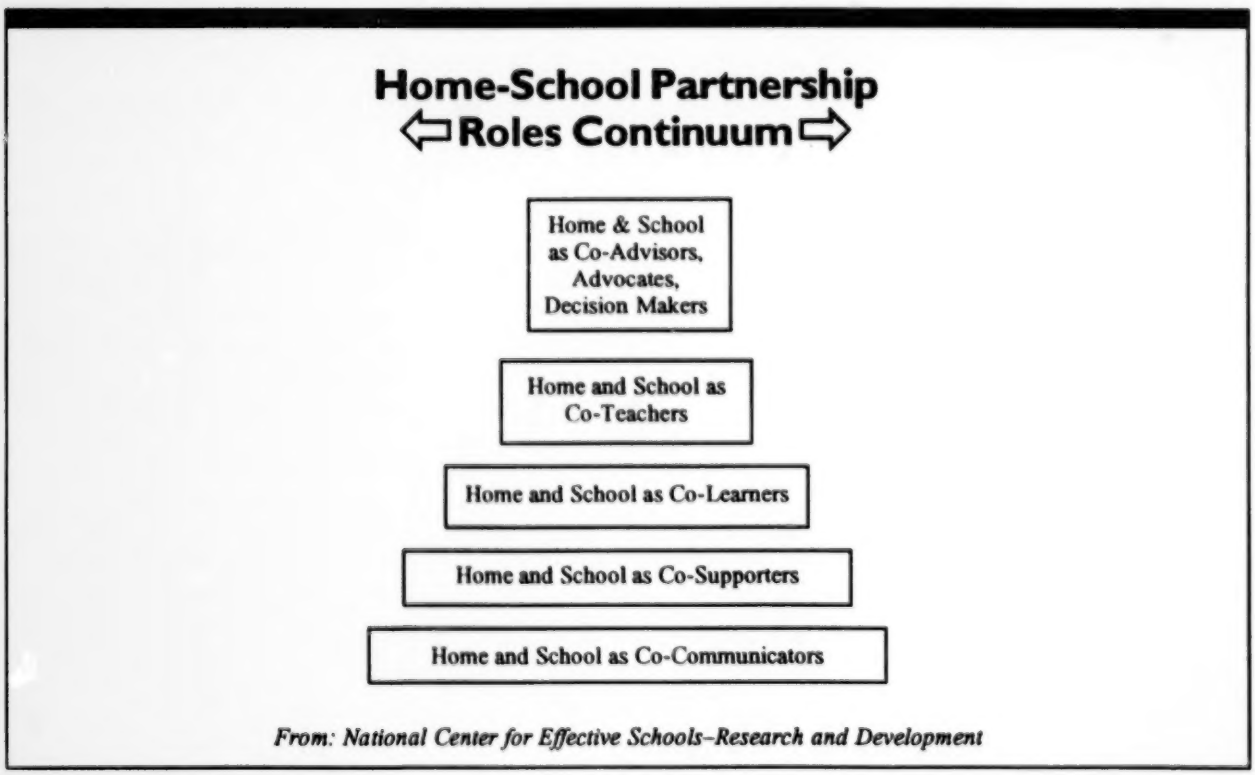
The roles are arranged in a pyramid suggesting that one level builds on another. Ideally, all parents will be involved as co-communicators. The term, co-communicator, implies that messages travel both ways. Parents can support the school's goals more effectively when there is regular communication back and forth. Schools can ensure that parents have received the messages when grade and assignment information is returned to the school with the parent's signature.

Another effective schools characteristic with family applications is "frequent monitoring of pupil progress." In a paper for the National Center for Effective Schools, Research and Development division in Wisconsin, Janet Chrispeels suggests the strategies on page 104 to enable parents and teachers to monitor jointly student progress with their assignments.

The other levels of the pyramid are defined by Chrispeels as follows:

Co-supporters — Parents support their children with basic child-rearing obligations; they support the school by attending functions at the school and as volunteers. Schools can support families by making arrangements for after-school care and assisting parents in obtaining social services, where appropriate.

Co-learners and co-teachers — Teachers and parents have the opportunity to learn much from each other in formal and informal contacts. Teachers can learn insights from parents about the child and the home environment that can be helpful in instruction and


Home-School Partnership
⇦ Roles Continuum ⇨
Home & School as Co-Advisors, Advocates, Decision Makers
Home and School as Co-Teachers
Home and School as Co-Learners
Home and School as Co-Supporters
Home and School as Co-Communicators

From: National Center for Effective Schools–Research and Development

Partnership Strategies for Monitoring Student Progress

- Assignment calendars and homework journals.
- Homework contracts.
- Weekly, biweekly, or monthly progress reports completed by the student, parents, and teacher.
- Telephone messages and answering systems with homework assignments and summaries of the day's activities.
- Two-way parent-teacher "telegrams" to share compliments or concerns.
- Weekly folders of student work or binders with dividers.
- Class newsletters or lesson plans to illustrate topics being covered.
- Quarterly back-to-school nights to review curriculum, expectations, and progress to-date.
- Information on how to help with homework and monitor progress.
- Parent-teacher conferences at school or at home that focus on goal setting and review of progress.
- Process portfolios that show ongoing student work in process.
- Curriculum reviews that involve parents, students, and community members.
- Regular class observation times established and encouraged.

discipline; parents can learn — through workshops and newsletters — strategies for helping their students or for gaining a greater understanding of the curriculum and its goals. Parents and students can provide useful feedback on homework that can guide teachers in preparing assignments that will be genuinely helpful.

Co-advocates, advisors, and decision makers — Parents can serve on school planning and management teams. To be effective, the parent's role must be a meaningful one, not a rubber stamp of decisions previously made. In diverse communities, representatives may need to be recruited to ensure that all key subpopulations of the school are represented.

KEY PLAYERS

Examples in this chapter show how strong a role parents and communities play in shaping the climate and culture of local schools and to some extent, the role the reputation of the school means to the culture of the community.

The relationship the school has with parents is an important influence on its climate. Schools that reach out to parents and make them feel welcome will find their climate enhanced if their overtures lead to increased community support.

Parents also influence the culture of the school by the norms they set at home. Parents who read to their children, help with homework, and ask questions about their schoolwork and activities signal to their children that education is important and should be the child's first priority.

The key to using these influences in positive ways is to be clear about what cultural signals are being sent from home to school and to change those subtle messages that are counterproductive. Secondly, schools can enlist community and parent support in reinforcing positive norms by increasing communication with the home and enlisting parents in specific partnership activities.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Challenge OF CHANGE

Change, by its very nature, is unsettling to people. Those who have studied both successful and failed reforms have found that the key to success is first addressing those factors that influence the organization's climate and culture. If the personal concerns of the people who must implement the change are not considered, those on the front lines may go through the motions without making meaningful changes in their behavior and attitudes. Their attitude might be: let's just wait this one out until the next "new thing" comes along.

The effort to reform and restructure schools in this country is one of fits and starts. Some schools have been very successful in embracing change. Other efforts have been met with passive resistance or outright opposition.

To ensure successful change, school leaders must take into consideration both the climate and culture of the school. The process of change will be met by a more receptive staff if those involved feel they are valued members of the family whose opinions are important.

CHANGING BELIEFS

In one Minnesota school, teachers who agreed to be trained on Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA) received the instruction at a posh resort with good food. Though these amenities may sound superficial, it sent a signal to the teachers that they were important. "This changed the teachers' belief systems about staff development, about the kids, about themselves as professionals," noted Shelley Roy of the Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program.

"It was a change in the culture of the school," Roy explained. "The focus of TESA is to change teacher behavior toward students. But when the principal planned how to do that, he knew it was just as important to attend to the culture and the climate at the same time."

Look at the record

Another climate consideration is the track record of the school district and the principal in taking suggestions from faculty and staff. If the principal has been giving lip service to collaborative decision making and resulting decisions reflect little evidence of staff input, the faculty understandably will be dubious that new efforts would be worth their time and energy.

The culture of the school also plays an important role in the success or failure

of reform efforts. "Reform proposals are more than just structure," noted Wisconsin researcher Kent Peterson. "There are implicit beliefs and assumptions on how you go about your work . . . about how things get done."

"It's pretty clear that in some schools there are norms of collegiality — expectations that people will share ideas, problems, and solutions," Peterson explained. "In those cases, a shared decision-making model would work well. If you don't have norms of collegiality, people don't want to work together. They're uncomfortable with it. It's not part of standard operating procedures."

District culture a key

Culture also is found at the district level. Some school districts operate with a very hierarchical culture, where decisions flow from the top down. These districts often impose strict rules about communication, such as prohibiting central office administrators from communicating directly with individual teachers and vice versa. In contrast, other districts give schools more autonomy to innovate at the local level, and principals are encouraged to compare notes and help each other problem solve.

Restructuring in a hierarchical system must begin with a strong statement from the school board and superintendent supporting the change. Then, ways must be found to accommodate the reforms within the realities of the culture, or else the culture must be modified to allow greater collaboration and autonomy at the school site.

An early step in school reform, then, is to analyze how any new ideas will change staff roles and the concepts of instruction and classroom practice. Coupled with that is an understanding of the culture of the school and whether existing cultural norms will serve to complement or undermine the proposed changes.

WHICH COMES FIRST?

Whether reform efforts should first focus on the school's climate or culture will depend on the individual school's circumstances. If there is a history of conflict between union and management or other kinds of upheaval, for example, it will be critical to focus on climate first. If relations between the staff and principal are fairly smooth, the first step may be getting right down to improving the school.

A new principal or administrator means another kind of upheaval that should be addressed. "When a principal first enters a school, all individuals have a heightened awareness of what the new administrator does," Peterson said. "Addressing basic needs of teachers and staff can be very symbolic when a principal is new. Such actions will have less impact as the principal is there longer.

"If in the past, relations between teachers and principal have been strained — because the previous principal never responded to reasonable requests — changing the work environment, such as by installing phones in classrooms, may be very powerful," he explained.

When a principal first enters a school, all individuals have a heightened awareness of what the new administrator does. Addressing basic needs of teachers and staff can be very symbolic when a principal is new. Such actions will have less impact as the principal is there longer.

Balancing act

School improvement experts warn that attention to climate requires a balancing act. It's important to address the needs of teachers when that is an issue, but reforms shouldn't focus on teacher needs to the extent that they take precedence over all else.

The reform — if it is to have lasting effect — must eventually focus on all the things that will make a difference in learning for the students.

"If you work on the periphery, you may never build a good culture because student learning is what's really important to teachers," Peterson warned. "At some point, teachers will say, 'Why are we doing all these things? They aren't important.'"

Start small

Carl Glickman, director of the Program for School Improvement at the University of Georgia, suggested that school improvement efforts should start with what he calls "zero-impact" activities — those that he says have no direct effect on children, such as bus duties, parking spaces, or the faculty lounge — so teachers will soon think past their own needs to focus on those of children.

The key is to recognize such efforts as transition al so the group eventually will move on to more significant projects.

The following chart illustrates the range of activities that can be undertaken by site-based governing committees, ranging from zero-impact activities to those that have a comprehensive impact on education. Here are some examples (though degree of impact of each is debatable):

"Zero" Impact
- Parking spaces
- Lunchroom supervision
- Faculty lounge
- Sunshine club
- Adult recreation
- Bus duties
- Refreshments

Minimal impact
- Textbook adoption
- Parent programs
- Inservice days
- Discipline policy

Core impact
- Curriculum
- Staff development
- Supervision
- Instructional programs
- Student assessment
- Action research
- Program evaluation
- Instructional budget

Comprehensive impact
- School budget
- Hiring of personnel
- Deployment of personnel
- Personnel evaluation

GETTING STARTED

Reform experts, including members of the Coalition of Essential Schools and outcome-based education organizations, advocate starting the process with conversations about what teachers want to accomplish with their students.

In Johnson City, New York, for example, the concept of outcomes-driven education evolved through a series of "gentle questions" that challenged teachers on how their behavior related to their beliefs about being professionals.

As noted earlier by Frank Alessi, project manager of Johnson City's Outcomes-Driven Development Model, those developing the system first determined that teachers and administrators wanted all children to learn, then asked whether it wouldn't be reasonable to research effective teaching techniques to ensure that children had a higher success rate.

When teachers expressed skepticism about research, they were asked whether they would rather go to a doctor who had kept current about new developments or one who had just been doing the same things year after year. Challenging basic assumptions and beliefs — but in a gentle, nonthreatening way — is one way to begin changing cultural norms and conditioning.

The Coalition of Essential Schools encourages prospective members to begin a conversation on the staff members' goals for improving education. The nine essential schools principles — including student-as-worker and diploma-by-exhibition — can be part of the conversation. Any decisions on reform, however, must be jointly determined by faculty members, not seen as a "hidden agenda" being railroaded by a small clique.

Senators and priests

That is not to say that such discussions need to be totally random. In building momentum for change, school leaders are wise to approach members of the school staff whose opinions are sought by others. Theodore Sizer calls such influential staff members "the senators." Authors Kent Peterson and Terrence Deal call such carriers of the culture "priests and priestesses."

"In every good school I've been in, there are a bunch of senators on the faculty who are generally respected by all," Sizer said in an interview. "If the senators set the standard or expectation, it tends to rub off. If people who would be senators do nothing but moan, groan, gripe, and come in late, it's pretty hard to do much."

"The principal who wants to make changes should make judgments about who the potential senators are and try to get them to join your parade," Sizer advised. "I've been in many schools where that's been very difficult, but in other schools, it works."

BUILDING A BASE

How many staff members does a principal need to support the reform before moving ahead? It depends on the individual principal and the school, according to Peterson.

"A lot of principals talk about wanting to have a 'critical mass' of support. The comfort level varies with the person and the situation," he explained. "Some inner-city principals say they need at least 25 percent of the faculty with them. Other principals are not comfort-

able proceeding unless 40 to 50 percent of the staff is on board.

Principals need to be careful that the group they start working with is not seen as 'the inside group' or one that has special access to the principal," Peterson cautioned. "Such a situation generates distrust and jealousy. With shared decision making, trust is very important."

Rewards for participating

The most effective principals are the ones who are seen as rewarding teachers — not for personal loyalty but because they are modeling the mission, vision , and core values. It's not easy because educational ends are so diverse, Peterson added. Do you promote higher order thinking or improvement in basic calculating skills?

For example, in Cherry Creek High School outside Denver, Colorado, Principal Hank Cotton gave perks to certain teachers — such as permission to attend conferences — but he made very clear it was because they were supporting the new vision for the school.

One of the biggest challenges principals face in building support for change is setting aside feelings resulting from bad experiences in the past and giving staff members the benefit of the doubt. "If the teacher says he or she is willing to try something new, the principal needs to accept and value that," Peterson advised.

Picking your people

In their book, *The Principal's Role in Changing School Culture*, Peterson and Deal profiled a number of successful principals. The common denominator was that the principal and staff of the school had been together a number of years. "One principal said it takes eight to nine years to build a cohesive culture," said Peterson.

It's important to recruit and select teachers who are not sycophants, but who share the principal's vision and values. The principal may also want a maverick — an analytical type — who keeps the effort on track.

Peterson cautioned that principals must guard against being elitist or exclusive. Unless new people come in with new perspectives, the teachers won't continue to grow.

THE NATURE OF CHANGE

The failures of school innovations have been studied for more than 20 years, and recent research has revealed that when an innovation results in "no significant differences," the problem is not so much with the program as with the failure to implement it. Success comes down to how the innovation is carried out by individuals.

Researchers at the University of Texas at Austin spent more than a decade studying the school improvement process, which led to the development of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM). Authors Shirley Hord, William Rutherford, Leslie Huling-Austin, and Gene Hall developed insightful recommendations in the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory publication, titled *Taking Charge of Change*, published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Here are their conclusions about the nature of change:

1. **Change is a process, not an event.** People tend to equate the complex process of change with the handing over of a new program, which is an event. Change must be viewed as a process occurring over a period of time, usually several years.
2. **Change is accomplished by individuals.** The temptation is to think of change in impersonal terms. In fact, change affects people, and their role in the process is of paramount importance. "Individuals must be the focus of attention in implementing a new program," the authors wrote. "Only when each (or almost each) individual in the school has absorbed the improved practice can we say that the school has changed."
3. **Change is a highly personal experience.** Some will pick up a new practice rapidly; others will be reluctant. Change will be most successful when support is geared to the diagnosed needs of the individual users.
4. **Change involves developmental growth.** Individuals involved in a change tend to demonstrate growth in terms of feelings and skills. These change as individuals develop more experience with the program.
5. **Change is best understood in operational terms.** Teachers and others on the front lines will relate to a change in terms of how it will affect them or change classroom practice. What changes in teacher or student values, beliefs, and behaviors will be required?
6. **The focus must be on individuals, innovations, and context.** We tend to focus on concrete aspects of a program, such as books or a curriculum. The essence of any change lies in its human, not its material, component.

Effective change facilitators, the authors concluded, work to meet the individual needs of people working in a system, recognizing that changes to accommodate the needs of one individual may have an effect on another part of the system. For these reasons, ideas about the timetable for implementing the program, interim steps, and even the final product may need to be altered along the way.

Psychological phases

Individuals go through clearly identifiable stages in deciding whether to be involved in an innovation. The phases are described by Ronald Sergeant in *Project SUCCESS* (Strategies Used to Cooperatively Create Effective Schools and Staffs) of the Wayne Intermediate School District outside Detroit, Michigan, as:

- **Awareness.** Gaining information and insight into the need for the improvement.
- **Interest.** Developing a curiosity about how the "new" program works and how it may benefit the person.
- **Appraisal.** Mentally evaluating the pros and cons of the innovation for one's own situation. The individual is concerned about how it affects him or her and how it would work.
- **Trial.** Trying out the new strategies on a small scale and determining how to manage the changes.
- **Adoption.** Deciding to make continued use of the new practice.

Models of implementing change

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model puts these psychological stages in terms of personal reactions individuals experience during the life cycle of the change. One key to managing change successfully is to be aware of each stage, to respond to the needs expressed, and to realize that each stage is part of a larger, long-term process.

Communicating the program

A common problem in implementing new programs, according to the experts, is that teachers often have little information on how an innovation will work in a real classroom. Also, teachers will tend to adopt innovations in different ways. Some may use only a textbook, while others will embrace the entire program, including the textbook and supplementary materials, the record-keeping system, and the new assessment instruments.

Teachers using only a quarter of the program will have different questions and problems from those who use all the elements. In reporting progress on implementation to the school board and in measuring success, it is essential that those in charge have some idea to what extent the program has been truly implemented.

"Innovative Configuration"

Gene Hall and S.F. Loucks developed a concept known as an Innovation Configuration, which is used to describe a new program in operational terms. Rather than depicting an innovation in terms of ultimate goals, which are difficult to translate into concrete practice, the Innovation Configuration characterizes the program in terms of:

- Instructional materials.
- Teacher behaviors (such as grouping students).
- Student activities (such as a prescribed writing process).
- Record-keeping or testing.

In describing the particular components, the change facilitator should identify which aspects of the program are *critical* to its success — and must be used — and which merely would be "nice to have." Once those components have been identified and analyzed, a checklist is developed that shows an "ideal" use of the program, minimal use, and what partial uses would be unacceptable. The Tutoring Program Checklist on page 110 is a sample.

The development of such checklists contributes to a culture supporting change by establishing norms of behavior. By specifying what behaviors are "ideal," "minimally acceptable," and "unacceptable," the Innovative Configuration helps to build a shared understanding of how teachers will act if they are embracing the program and trying to make it work, rather than paying lip service to the innovation.

The checklist also helps individuals personalize the innovation. Since the IC clearly spells out the boundaries, teachers can, within prescribed limits, adapt the innovation to their teaching style.

ADDRESSING CONCERNS

According to the Concerns-Based Adoption Model, teachers move through the stages of concern in a sequential, predictable pattern — at least in the early stages of awareness, seeking information, personal concerns, management, and consequence (how the use

of the program is affecting students). Depending on the program itself, smaller numbers of teachers will move to collaboration with other teachers and to refocusing their efforts.

To ensure that changes are adopted, facilitators need to be aware of where each teacher stands in these stages of concern in order to address them.

In the early stages, the teachers' concerns will be typically personal. They wonder how different the change will really be, how much the new program will change their teaching style, whether they will succeed, and in some cases, whether the innovation is going to eliminate their jobs (for example, by deemphasizing electives). These personal concerns must be addressed before each individual can look at the innovation objectively.

The next stage, management concerns, often involves time management or the degree of paperwork and record-keeping that will be required. If teachers at this stage receive inservice training that is overly philosophical or otherwise off-target, they often will react with increased anxiety or even resentment.

Effectively identifying individual concerns and addressing them in a timely fashion, then, is key to maintaining a positive school climate during the implementation of a new program.

The authors of *Taking Charge of Change,* a book published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, recommend three methods for identifying and addressing teachers' stages of concern:

- Informal, face-to-face conversations.
- Open-ended statements (used with groups).
- Stages of Concern questionnaire (formal research).

The Various Forms of an Innovation

Tutoring Program Checklist

*1. Materials and Equipment (1) At least 5 different program materials are used with each child (each session).	(2) At least 3 different program materials are used with each child each session.	(3) Fewer than 3 different program materials are used with each child each session.
*2. Diagnosis (1) Children are diagnosed individually using a combination of tests and teacher judgment.	(2) Children are diagnosed individually using teacher judgment only.	(3) Children are not diagnosed individually.
3. Record-Keeping (1) Individual record sheet is used to record diagnosis and prescription.	(2) No individual record sheets are used.	
*4. Use of Teaching Technique (1) Continually readjusts task according to child needs; uses rewards to reinforce success.	(2) Does not continually readjust task according to child needs; does not use rewards.	
5. Grouping (1) Children are taught in pairs.	(2) Children are not taught in pairs.	
*6. Scheduling (1) Children are taught for 30 minutes 3 times per week. Each session is equally divided between children.	(2) Children are taught for 30 minutes 3 times per week, time for each child and each task varies slightly when necessary.	(3) Children are not taught for 30 minutes per week 3 times per week, or time for each child and each task varies markedly or is not considered.

This chart sets up a continuum of possible modifications to the program. The far-left column represents the ideal; those modifications to the right of the solid lines are unacceptable.
* Denotes critical components.
Reproduced with permission from *Taking Charge of Change.* ©1987, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Informal conversations

The face-to face conversation is the most practical

Stages of Concern During Change

Stages of Concern (from greatest to least)		Expressions of Concern
6	Refocusing	I have some ideas about something that would work even better.
5	Collaboration	I am concerned about relating what I am doing with what other instructors are doing
4	Consequence	How is my use affecting kids?
3	Management	I seem to be spending all my time getting material ready.
2	Personal	How will using it affect me?
1	Informational	I would like to know more about it.
0	Awareness	I am not concerned about it (the innovation).

From: The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, Texas

method of addressing individual concerns in a local school. A good place to start is to ask casually how the teacher feels about the new program or a specific aspect of it.

Experts also offer these tips for an effective interview:

- Ask appropriate questions in a relaxed manner.
- Be a good listener by allowing sufficient time for a response, and avoid directing the answer or putting words in their mouths.
- Avoid selective listening by giving cues that you are paying attention, such as by asking for elaborations or restating an answer to make sure it was understood correctly.
- Analyze the content of the answer for the concerns being expressed.

Sometimes the interviewer must look beyond the surface words to determine the actual underlying concern. Another problem is focusing on one part of a response without considering the entire statement.

For example, a teacher may say he is concerned the program is not meeting his students' needs because he does not have time to prepare all the materials. Focusing on the first part of the statement would indicate a "consequence" concern — that it was not helping students. Analyzing the entire sentence, however, reveals that the concern is one of time management. One solution would be to help the teacher organize the classroom to allow more time to develop materials.

Open-ended statements

Open-ended statements are more appropriate for analyzing the responses of groups because the technique is more formal than conversation. Teachers are asked to respond in complete sentences to the question, "When you think about _____ (the innovation or some aspect of it), what are you concerned about?"

The authors said it is not uncommon to get entire paragraphs in response. But again, it is important to look at each statement separately and the entire response collectively to get an accurate picture of where each teacher is on the continuum of concerns.

The authors cautioned that both these methods tend to elicit the areas teachers are *most* concerned about, masking other concerns that also may need addressing. Since concerns change over time, they should be addressed periodically.

The third technique is formal research using a questionnaire. A copy of the Stages of Concern Questionnaire is available from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 211 East 7th Street, Austin, Texas 78701.

Stages of concern

Taking Charge of Change suggests that movement through the stages of concern cannot be forced, but progress can be encouraged with appropriate backing. "Concerns do not exist in a vacuum. Concerns are

influenced by participants' feelings about an innovation, by their perception of their ability to use it, by the setting in which the change occurs, by the number of other changes in which they are involved, and most of all, by the kind of support and assistance they receive as they attempt to implement change," the book says.

It is critical to address the individual concerns of teachers involved in implementing a new program because of their profound impact on school climate. To the degree that teachers believe their concerns are heard and addressed, they will be more likely to feel confident about their success — and they will support the change. The fact that teachers' feelings are solicited and responded to will reinforce the message that teachers are important to the school's success and that their concerns are taken seriously.

NEW CULTURAL NORMS

Culture — which is built over time — is at odds with change because it threatens the old way of doing things. Therefore, the key to institutionalizing change is to surround the reforms with cultural norms that support the new system. Culture expert Terrence Deal underscored the value of transition rituals to "graft new starts onto old roots."

A place to start developing consensus for new norms is to explore as a school staff a series of questions about what values the school considers most important and wants to promote. In an article in *Educational Leadership* with Allan Kennedy, Deal posed the following questions:

1. What are shared values of education that unite your staff?
2. If principals, teachers, students, custodians, and parents are asked what a particular school stands for, can they reply, and are these replies similar or different?
3. Who are the educational visionaries?
4. Who are the heroes of the school and what values do they represent? Are they celebrated or ignored?
5. How meaningful and alive are faculty meetings, parent get-togethers, and other rituals?
6. How memorable are opening day ceremonies, back-to-school nights, graduations, and other cultural ceremonies?
7. How does the school begin the day?
8. What stories do professionals tell each other?
9. What stories circulate in the local community?
10. Who are education's storytellers?
11. How can new teachers learn the profession without heroes as role models or stories as exemplars?
12. Why should principals spend time observing in classrooms when they are rewarded for the promptness and neatness of paperwork?
13. Why should students attend class, come on time, or stay in school if they do not identify with its values?
14. How can we expect students to commit themselves to schoolwork when the student subculture rewards popularity, deviance, or athletic ability?

The value of nostalgia

When dealing with the stress of change, experts recommend giving people a chance to relate to something old and familiar. There is a place for nostalgia. Anthropologist Jennifer James calls this "the dance of life — two steps forward and one step back."

Forcing change causes fear that things are out of control. For this reason, it is important when undertaking significant reforms like restructuring that schools keep some old rituals, such as assemblies and special observances to reassure the staff and students that some cherished traditions will continue despite the changes.

A nurturing place

Administrators and change facilitators need to keep climate and culture in mind during any reform. It is important to address the legitimate — as well as the irrational — fears of individuals to nurture a receptive climate for change.

In addition, reformers must reinforce cultural norms, including trust, collaboration, and support, which will encourage people to take risks and change their behavior. It is always more comfortable to do things the same old way. Change is always somewhat risky.

When the climate meets individual needs and the culture is one that reinforces the desire to improve, then schools will be places where children will be eager to learn and adults will look forward to teaching and managing them.

How is culture transmitted at both the school and district level? The answer is communication — a key element in any program. The next chapter explores this dimension.

CHAPTER NINE

Communication & CHANGE

Communication plays a vital role in shaping both climate and culture. If there is to be success in any planned change, school leaders must mobilize all channels of communication — verbal, nonverbal, symbolic, and written — to transmit messages that will inform, inspire, and persuade students, staff, and the community.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, school leaders always are communicating. Those communications — both at the school and district level — will set a tone that can either reinforce or undermine their goals

Actions are a symbolic form of communication. For example, the kinds of activities to which a principal devotes his or her time sends a message about priorities despite what he or she writes in the newsletter. The superintendent who says people are important but spends almost no time talking with teachers and principals is sending a nonverbal message that contradicts the spoken one. Such a conflict between stated and actual priorities negatively affects climate by causing resentment and lowering the administrator's credibility.

By contrast, the superintendent who visits schools regularly and the principal who spends time in the halls and classrooms communicates that students and teachers — and by extension, learning — are the district's top priorities.

Leaders will get maximum value from their communication efforts by sending a uniform message on several levels, verbally and nonverbally, through conversation, speeches, actions, and written communications — including memos, policies, and publications.

While some of these efforts traditionally fall under the umbrella of "public relations," there is more to good communications than media relations and a monthly newsletter.

CLIMATE AND COMMUNICATIONS

When Larry Nyland became superintendent of the Pasco, Washington, Schools, his top priority was to improve the climate of the district by building pride among staff members.

"The district had eight superintendents in 20 years, and the staff was demoralized," Nyland explained. "Teachers felt they were 'country cousins' to their

colleagues in other districts. As a result, they would distance themselves from Pasco and from teaching."

Nyland decided to focus on the positive by rewarding teachers who demonstrated excellence. He sent "Supergrams" — notes from the superintendent — commending those staff members who were reinforcing district goals. Enclosed was an apple lapel pin for them to wear.

At the same time, he initiated the "Four Pointer" district newsletter, which published in bold type the names of staff members recognized for their accomplishments.

"I resisted efforts to make the newsletter a 'house organ' that promoted district goals," Nyland commented. "Instead, the focus was on building pride." The effort paid off. "When the emphasis was positive, people were pleased," he said. "They knew they had a right to be proud."

Healing old wounds

The response was noteworthy in light of the district's recent history. Three years earlier, there had been a teachers' strike and race riots. Striking teachers wore lapel pins in the form of a "golden foot," so the apple pin was a bit of a risk for Nyland.

"I was not sure they'd be receptive to a pin," he recalled. "To my surprise and delight, staff members wore the apple pins with pride. It was not something big where they were singled out from colleagues. It was subtle, but it was there."

The district received a Chamber of Commerce award for excellence in education, creating a new can-do spirit in the community.

The Pasco example brings up an important point. When repairing relations that have been strained, it is important to start small and build credibility. Nyland did not hold big assemblies and put a few teachers in the spotlight, which might have created resentment and divisions. Instead, he began sending small messages of encouragement and recognition to many staff members throughout the district. The result was positive and infectious.

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

Reshaping a school's culture is more of a long-term proposition, but principals can use the same channels of communication to mold attitudes. In dealing with culture, however, it is often more effective to model the behaviors they want to encourage and to conduct symbolic activities.

For example, Frank Boyden, legendary headmaster of Deerfield Academy, a private school in rural Massachusetts, saw the primary value of his school as that of taking every opportunity to shape character, teach, and motivate students. Writing in *The Principal's Role in Shaping School Culture,* Kent Peterson and Terrence Deal described how Boyden would put that value into action by regularly sharing a word of advice for his students as they boarded the bus to go home for the weekend.

Boyden also believed in each person taking responsibility for the appearance of the school. To model this value, he frequently was observed stooping to pull out a weed or pick up a piece of litter.

Inner-city challenges

"Frances Hedges" was principal of an urban elementary school with many problems, including a rigid district bureaucracy. The latter factor forced the Far West Regional Laboratory to grant the school, and the principal, anonymity in its study of the school's successes, which was later reported by authors Kent Peterson and Terrence Deal.

Hedges built a sense of community at the school and improved order and discipline by focusing on two key areas: academic achievement and self-esteem.

In multiple ways, Hedges emphasized the importance of these core values: that all students must have sound reading skills and that the school must promote a warm, nurturing climate in which students could develop a sense of self-esteem. Here is what she did:

- **Actions** — Hedges hired a full-time reading specialist and insisted that the librarian work with the specialist. She monitored student progress and reviewed all report cards.
- **Verbal** — In faculty meetings, she spoke of the importance of using the reading specialist, encouraged the use of reading centers, and suggested reading lab activities.
- **Modeling** — She visited classrooms regularly and worked directly with teachers to encourage an emphasis on reading and the development of reading centers.

To develop student and teacher self-esteem, Hedges worked to make the physical and social environment of the school a source of pride. This was typical of her technique:

She met with two students identified as having low self-esteem and made them captains of a "chair crew" that would prepare the auditorium for assemblies.

As Peterson and Deal described it, "She called the boys into her office and, with a serious face, explained the job. Jimmy would be responsible for setting up chairs, Lafayette for putting them away. Each would select a small group of other children, a team, to help them. 'You'll have these jobs for the whole year,' Hedges explained, 'so it's up to you to make sure that things are orderly.' After she showed them how the chairs were to be set up and stored in the auditorium, Hedges left the boys. They leaped into the air, smiling, and shook each other's hand."

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND CULTURE

Shaping and transmitting culture is not solely the job of the school administrator. Those school districts fortunate enough to employ a public relations director have somebody who can help transmit a culture by providing the context of language — by defining what it is that makes a district or school special.

"Top public relations people build an image based on the identity of the organization," observed Terrence Deal of Vanderbilt University. The public relations professional discovers and broadcasts the nature of that identity to build support for the district.

"You need to figure out who you are before you can broadcast," noted Deal, which he said comes back to reading the culture. Once the identity is determined, public relations staff can mobilize every student and staff member to carry the message.

"Each child and staff member goes home and shares something related to the school with someone else. Good public relations provides a context of language to help people talk about their experiences," he explained.

What is PR?

Public relations is a management function designed to improve decision making as well as enhance communications. The National School Public Relations Association offers this definition:

> Educational public relations is a planned and systematic management function designed to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization. It relies on a comprehensive two-way communications process involving both internal and external publics, with a goal of stimulating a better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments, and needs of the organization. Educational public relations programs assist in interpreting public attitudes, identify and help shape polices and procedures in the public interest, and carry on involvement and information activities that can earn public understanding and support.

The following generally are considered to be the essential characteristics of a public relations program:

- **Planned and systematic** — The public relations program should be guided by an overall plan that ensures ongoing communication with the district's or school's "publics."
- **Two-way communication** — The plan should include mechanisms to receive feedback from employees and members of the public, to ensure that messages are received, and to find out what key publics are concerned about.

Sample Communications Grid, Representing Some of the Publics and Channels

Some school systems use a grid or matrix to check up on which communication channels reach certain key publics. You may want to try this technique in your schools. A ✓ means that channel or activity reaches a specific public. A (✓) indicates a possible benefit as a byproduct.

Channels	Public	Parents	Students	Teachers	Custodians	Secretaries	Taxpayers	Board of Education	News Media
Parent-Teacher Conference		✓	✓	✓					
Surveys		✓							
School Brochures		✓							
News Releases—TV, Radio, Newspapers		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Activity Calendar		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fact Card		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Phone Calls to Parents		✓							
Supt. Advisory Council		✓		(✓)				✓	(✓)
School Newsletters		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(✓)	
Open Houses		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(✓)		
Board of Education Meeting		✓	(✓)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student Advisory Board			✓						✓

Employee Opinions Affect Community Perceptions

Each employee of the school district is an expert on school matters in the eyes of neighbors, acquaintances, and family members. Those working at the grass-roots level, including bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and school secretaries, often have the greatest credibility. Their friends know they are in the schools on a daily basis and expect them to speak candidly about what they see.

Thus, it can be a big mistake for schools to focus entirely on the teaching staff. To mount a successful public relations effort, school board policy should include public relations responsibilities in the job descriptions of *all* employees. The district also should provide training to all employees so they will have the skills and information to carry out this role effectively.

Mixed messages

When PR training for employees is not a priority, the messages that get transmitted can be quite different from what administrators and school board members intend. A story is told about a Kansas school district that introduced a reading program for primary students designed to provide individual attention for students. After much study, the program was implemented. However, rumors immediately began circulating that it was no good.

The AASA publication, *Public Relations for School Administrators* by Don Bagin, Don Ferguson, and Gary Marx, described the public relations director's efforts to trace the source of the rumor. Greeting the custodian one day, the PR director asked "Henry" his opinion of the new reading program.

"It's terrible," Henry replied. "It's just a crying shame what those children are being exposed to." To support his contention, Henry took the public relations director to one of the second grade classrooms, where the door was open and they could observe firsthand what was going on inside.

The children were organized in small groups around the room, with each group working on something different. There was a low buzz in the room as the children pursued their reading lessons enthusiastically. The teacher moved from group to group, as did an aide.

"See there," exclaimed Henry. "See all that chaos! Those kids sprawled all over the room, everybody doing their own thing. How can they possibly be learning anything, especially something as important as reading?"

The public relations director had found the source of his rumor. When Henry went to church or to the Friday night football games, people asked him about the new reading program. The only problem was that the teachers and principal hadn't bothered to tell Henry, and the rest of the nonteaching staff, about the new reading program when they introduced it.

Since these were noncertified people, the rationale went, why did they need to know about the curriculum?

The answer, of course, is that they need to know a lot. In fact, they must be kept informed about everything that's going on at school. If they are district office employees, they must know about what is happening districtwide. If they are school-based employees, they must know about their own school as well as about major district activities.

- **Internal and external** — To be successful, an organization must work effectively and seek to build understanding with its internal audiences and the community on which it depends for support.
- **Open and honest** — Credibility is a precious commodity that is built over time and can be shattered easily. Parents and the community have a right to know what is taking place in the public schools.

PR for everybody

Experts recommend including information about public relations in the basic orientation program for each employee joining the district. Employees should be told:

- Available communications channels including tip sheets for feature stories or ideas for staff newsletters.
- Suggestions on ways they can incorporate public relations in their jobs.
- Explanations about the demographics of the district and the district's philosophy and priorities.
- The impact an employee can have on community perceptions by what he or she chooses to focus on in conversations.

Employees should not only be told the good news. When there are problems, staff members should be given a background on the criticism and what the district or school is doing to address the problems.

In this way, the "grapevine" can be harnessed in a positive way.

Communication needs

Research on organizational communication has found that employees generally have three communication needs. They want to know:

- Where the organization is heading.
- How it will get there.
- What it all means to them.

"Employees understand that their individual well-being and their very futures are tied closely to the overall success of the organization," noted Roger D'Aprix in *Communicating for Productivity*. "As members of the enterprise, they want to know generally what the battle plan is, what strategy has been worked out to make that plan work, and how hard they will have to fight to do what actually has been charted for the organization."

When school districts are under fire, either for student performance or on legislative issues such as school finance, it is important to keep employees up to date on the issues over time. Regular communication, through supervisors and in print, of activities of the legislature and where the district stands on given issues can positively affect climate by reducing employee anxiety.

Year-round public relations

Communicating with all the important publics in an organization is an ongoing activity. Just as an organization's culture does not spring fully formed overnight in a new school, the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions held about a school evolve over time. All constituents develop their opinions based on their vantage point as a parent, staff member, student, neighbor, or nonparent taxpayer.

For this reason, efforts should be made to communicate with all the target audiences who are affected by the school and whose opinions have an impact on the school. There are compelling reasons to ensure that all a school's key audiences or "publics" receive communication directly from the schools.

Gallup polls on education have shown regularly that members of the public have a higher opinion of their local school than of schools in general. That is because parents have firsthand knowledge of the education their children are receiving, but they form attitudes about education in general by what they read, hear, and see in the mass media.

Since news is defined as that which is unusual or noteworthy, the stories that make news tend to be negative, such as violence, gangs, misuse of funds, dropouts, and low test scores. The media consider teaching and learning the schools' job, and thus stories about students achieving goals are generally not reported because they are not newsworthy.

Emphasize the positive. Under these conditions, it is imperative that schools and districts tell their stories directly to constituents.

Employees, moreover, are important targets of communication for at least two reasons: good communication will contribute to a positive climate, and effective employee communication helps disseminate good news in the community.

Climate builders

Good communication enhances climate by helping the staff feel they are part of a team. Conversely, employees feel they are not valued if they are "left in the dark" about what is happening in the school or district. In the AASA survey for this report, a number of the items cited that can "restore a climate" were directly related to communication:

- Clear purpose (vision, mission, goals and objectives).
- Sense of direction.
- The knowledge that their supervisors and colleagues care about them.
- Communication about problems.
- Positive, knowledgeable, energetic, and communicative leader.
- Ownership.

Key communicator network

One effective method for getting a school's message to the community is by developing a key communicator network. As a bonus, the communicators give school officials a pipeline into what community members are thinking.

The first step is for staff and community supporters to identify opinion leaders — those who come in contact with many people and whose opinion is valued. Rather than members of the formal power structure, the list more often includes barbers, small business owners, real estate agents, and post office employees.

The process can begin with staff members and secondary students, then invitations are sent to the prospective Key Communicators. They are asked to

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Resources

Coalition of Essential Schools
Education Department, Box 1969
Brown University
Providence, Rhode Island 02912
(401) 863-3384

Lawrence Lezotte
Effective Schools Products
2199 Jolly Road, Suite 160
Okemos, Michigan 48864
(517) 349-8841

Graymill Educational Consultants
8450 Hickman Road, Suite 29
Des Moines, Iowa 50325
(515) 252-8650
(Gender/Ethnic Expectations-Student Achievement)
The Equity Principal

National Paideia Center
University of North Carolina
CB #8045
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27599
(919) 962-7379

Johnson City Public Schools
666 Reynolds Road
Johnson City, New York 13790
(607) 763-1200
(Outcomes-Driven Development Model)

National Writing Project
School of Education
Room 5627 Tolman Hall
University of California at Berkeley
Berkeley, California 94720
(510) 642-0963

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
211 East 7th Street
Austin, Texas 78701
(512) 476-6861

Sam Kerman
Kerman Associates
Box 5738
Diamond Bar, California 91765
(909) 860-6111
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